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# NUDE SOULS

## CHAPTER I

WARNS THE READER OF THE TRUE NATURE OF THE  
BOOK

HIS success was the result of his perfect control of his temper. He was never known to lose it. Even when the devout old Lady Mompesson slapped him on the cheek in a sudden rage with her large fan, he turned the other in compliance with the Scriptures ; and he did it with such inexplicable mockery that the old lady, who had spent her life distributing tracts among her tenants, and exhorting them to love one another and return good for evil, felt as if her reputation for piety had been literally shattered at a blow. She seemed thoroughly ashamed of herself, and when Rewbell allowed his cold, searching eye to rest upon her—an eye full of the sarcasm which only an eye can express—he was visibly pleased at her embarrassment. As she sat on the chair before him, coughing superfluously and gripping her mittens, and wondering what Porlock, the Vicar, and what her cottagers would say if they got to hear of her sudden unchristian conduct, Rewbell gave her

to understand that he was ready to return good for evil, and that she might consider herself forgiven. Never until he turned his pale face on her at that moment did she suppose that the human eye could contain such a blighting expression. And yet she had not humiliated him without provocation. A smarting cheek was, after all, a mild sort of punishment, she thought, for the strange troubles which Rewbell had brought to North Bayton, and was still busily bringing. Ever since her husband's death she had noticed that he was becoming even more aggressive, and that his ascendancy over the young lord, the only son of her late married years, was now preposterous and bewildering. In itself that was bad enough. What was worse was that three sinister and ghastly men—Nicolay, Horneck, and Wharton—had now appeared, and were working, she believed, in conjunction with Rewbell. She used to hear their voices during long summer afternoons as they sat drinking with the boy in the Oak Room, spending with him interminable hours and consuming interminable cups. Then, with the exception of Rewbell, they would mount four of the young lord's best horses, and go at a gallop over the limitless downs which spread themselves on all sides of North Bayton, backwards to the woods and the marsh, and forwards to the cliffs and the sea.

Sometimes Harold had drunk too much, and could ride only with grave risk at such a pace, so that she remained terror-struck till their return at nightfall or midnight, imagining some disastrous end at last to her poor boy's follies. But they always came galloping back without mishap on hot saddles and sweating horses, and she was thankful to have him safe, whether sober or unsobey, and to get him to bed.

During the brief interval between the old lord's death and the young lord's attainment of his majority, Lady Mompesson had made an effort to alienate Rewbell finally from her son. She had already watched with amazement her husband surrendering his will to a man whom she persisted in describing as only one of the menials of the household, but who had clung so tenaciously to its fortunes that now they appeared to be altogether in his grasp. She hoped, however, that Harold, who, so she flattered herself, had inherited something of her own character, would shake off an individual whose exact purposes, though difficult to ascertain, would be sure to be sinister. To her dismay, Harold refused to listen to her.

When one day, a few months after her husband's death, and a few weeks before Harold's coming of age, she suddenly ordered Rewbell to leave North Bayton for ever, he went quietly to his rooms, without asking explanations, and packed half his things. Then he saw Harold, and told him he was about to leave him, and hoped that the young lord would find a more faithful servant, gave him back many of the documents connected with the estate which had been in his keeping, such as those referring to the new cottages and the new drainage, etc., and the ring also which in an outburst of boyish ardour Harold had given him in token of perpetual friendship.

Harold, in a great state of excitement, rushed to his mother, and informed her with much emphasis that *he* was master here, and not *she*, and that she must cease to interfere. For the moment she did cease to interfere, so that, although she was greatly upset, Rewbell remained at North Bayton, and he and Harold had a

bottle of the old port over this incident. Rewbell was thus able to proceed with the plans of two new cottages, which, indeed, were destined for Nicolay and Wharton. And if Nicolay preferred oak wainscoting in his parlour to mere pitch-pine, and Wharton a higher roof, these requests would all very likely be granted, for Harold was nothing if not generous.

' You see,' said Rewbell, ' good property brings higher rents, and is thus cheaper in the end. It is always better to build thoroughly in the good old English way. If your ancestors had not built North Bayton so solidly, you would not be sitting in it to-day. It has lasted for generations.'

' By Jove ! you're right, Edwin,' exclaimed Harold, as if it were a revelation ; and he tapped the walls, which were as thick as a prison's.

' Well, then,' continued Rewbell, ' these cottages, if you build them first-class, will do you credit.'

' We'll do it, then,' said Harold. ' Fire ahead with them, and, hang it all ! don't tell me any more about them till they're finished.'

But Lady Mompesson watched the building of these cottages with growing resentment, and had many disputes about them with her son before the roofs were completed.

' Harold,' said Lady Mompesson, alarmed, ' I do not know what all this will come to. Your poor father is hardly cold in his grave, and all these innovations are commencing already. Where is the money to build these cottages ? Your father has left you with encumbrances. I tell you, beware of that man ! He is making you build, build, but he is unbuilding your character, Harold !'

'No, no, ma—you're prejudiced.. You know how much father thought of Edwin.'

'And for whom are these cottages being built?' asked Lady Mompesson with increasing agitation. 'For two of those three blackguards whose company you prefer to mine. They are going to settle down and lay siege to us, then? I wonder when we shall see their rents!'

'Blackguards!' exclaimed Harold after her. 'Wharton was in the army, and army ~~chaps~~ are always decent. Horneck is a doctor, and a very good one too. Nicolay was a printseller, I think. Why mayn't they be my tenants as well as other people?'

'Ah, I hope you will be guided!' said Lady Mompesson. 'What are these men, all of middle age, and without work, three vulgar men, doing here? They are battening on *you*, you foolish, innocent boy!'

If he would remain innocent, that would be all she would ask. In her heart of hearts she believed he would, as all mothers hope and believe. She implored him to go back to Oxford to complete his education. He said he would go back after the celebration of his coming of age. Meantime he preferred his horses and his downs. Oxford was stuffy. In a few weeks he would be twenty-one, when additional power, with the opportunity of abusing it, would be placed in his hands. Her chief anxiety was lest her authority over him would go on diminishing, and Rewbell's go on increasing. In fact, it was on the subject of these cottages that she lost her temper with Rewbell, and suddenly assaulted him with her fan. She had ordered him that afternoon to give her the precise reason of their erection, since she had received only vague and unsatisfactory replies from Harold.

'Your ladyship,' said Rewbell, 'ought not to give yourself pain by an interference not strictly within your right, since the young lord is practically of age now, or, at least, he will be of age, and master here, before these cottages are finished.'

It was then that Lady Mompesson, unable to repress her indignation, shattered her fan on his left ear, and repented in the way we have seen. Rewbell was glad of that slight misdemeanour. It strengthened his position. The perturbed mother felt more keenly than ever that a sort of invisible barrier was being built up between herself and her son. She was losing him.

She felt that she was no companion for him. He had been born to her very late. Indeed, her great enemy, Mrs. Juxon, had said that Lady Mompesson looked more like the boy's grandmother than his mother. And the jibe had been carried to Lady Mompesson, who often thought about it. She knew it was true. She envied mothers who were still young, although their children had reached *eighteen* or *twenty*. What would she not have given to have been able to fide with him, instead of letting him go off day after day in the company of bad men? And yet she could not honestly believe that if his father had lived longer the chance of going to the devil would have been made less easy. Rewbell had had an inexplicable influence on him too.

This man had entered Lord Mompesson's service as secretary. He was handsome—indeed, far handsomer than Lady Mompesson ever expected Harold to be. Moreover, he was clever—far cleverer than ever Harold would be, and he had displayed such an aptitude for affairs that the old lord, who had a poor business head,

gave him finally the management of his Sussex estate. He was now thirty-five.

Lady Mompesson had taken a violent dislike to him from the beginning. He knew it, and was careful. In spite of her plotting for his discharge, however, he was very comfortably and irrevocably housed in the rooms above her own, which were certainly better furnished than those of the young lord himself, who during his father's lifetime took the title Lord Bayton. With her own eyes and ears Lady Mompesson saw and heard Rewbell one day, while the old lord was still alive, order a servant to remove a charming oak cabinet from the Oak Room, and to carry it upstairs to his private study, which overlooked the lawn. When she remonstrated indignantly, Rewbell quietly told her that it was the old lord's pleasure. Numerous valuable papers pertaining to the estate, said Rewbell, had accumulated to such an extent that there could be no better receptacle for them than this spacious old cabinet, with its double locks and iron fastenings. Lady Mompesson had to content herself with saying that she was being robbed right and left.

Although she never entered Rewbell's rooms—hardly, indeed, ever passed the doors, except now and again to go to Harold's apartments, which adjoined—she knew that the secretary's quarters were luxuriously installed. For instance, the presents which the old lord had received from the Bey of Tunis were reposing on Rewbell's mantelpiece; the picture bought at Vienna, and judged by experts to be a genuine Tintoretto, was hanging on his wall. He had a Persian carpet and damask chairs, and, indeed, many of the most exquisite bric à brac at North Bayton gravitated mysteriously to his rooms.

When Lady Mompesson asked her husband for an explanation, he used to shrug his shoulders, and say that Edwin was indispensable, and that it was cheaper to retain him by gratifying his sumptuous whims. What was the ivory of the Tunisian Bey, or the gloomy canvas of the Venetian painter, to a drowsy old lord who, any night after his eight glasses of port, might mistake the one for the other? When Lady Mompesson replied that, if his friends knew of his folly, he would justly become their opprobrium and laughing-stock, he only laughed good-humouredly himself, and asked her to stop teasing him.

'The next thing will be,' she said, 'that that man will be sitting at our dinner-table.'

'And why not?' replied the old lord. 'Edwin is a gentleman.'

With exquisite courtesy Rewbell, therefore, continued to invite the old laughing lord to sit on his own chairs in that luxurious upper room, and smoke his own cigars, and tipple his own brandy, almost till the day of his death. Such an unusual influence must have, thought Lady Mompesson, an unusual cause. That she had hitherto never known it, and that she continued to be ignorant even till long after the drowsy old lord had become drowsy for ever, was due to her own dulness, very likely, and Rewbell's skill.

Lady Mompesson was pious, and Rewbell knew that pious people are notoriously deficient in the imagination of crime. Piety brings no very deep knowledge of the human soul, or only the knowledge of the best that is in the soul. That is as it should be. But the soul's problems, its deeps, its diabolism, its myriad confusions, its unnumbered pains, lie unexplored by piety. Besides,

if you wish precise information about any man, surely the last person to ask is his wife. She knows least of all. And Lady Mompesson, even although she had struck the right scent, would happily have been often diverted from it by the pains that the old lord took to show her the utmost respect. She would have been the last person in the world he would have offended, for he was always nervous about her opinion of him. He hardly ever took a resolution without considering what her approval of it would be. Except in the single instance of his infatuation for Rewbell, there was hardly a question on which they had openly disagreed.

Now, there was a certain Millicent Heath whom Porlock, the Vicar, during the last few years of the old lord's life, had been assiduously recommending to the charity of the neighbourhood. She was the daughter of old Heath, the miller of Eight Bells, who had become bankrupt. The great vanes which used to turn so gaily to the west wind or the east wind were now motionless, and old Heath, the widower, was shedding tears of fury in the poor-house. He had ground vast tons of wheat in his day, and besides good payment for his work, had generally received out of every load the miller's bag or half-bag of flour. But now he had scarcely a loaf to eat.

There were two causes for his disaster. First of all, as his friends told him, he had not marched with the times. A steam-engine for grinding corn had been set up in the district, and the fame of its swift and thorough grinding had penetrated every farmstead in that part of Sussex. Heath, however, felt sure that his clients would stick to the old mill, as he meant to do—the old mill which had ground the corn of their forefathers for

generations, whose sails had turned round gaily to the winds of a hundred years. But first one farmer and then another sent small instalments of grain to the steam-engine, just to see, as they said, what it would do with them, and they were so satisfied with the result that still larger loads were sent, and then all the wheat of their fields. They began to make awkward excuses to the old miller, such as that he took too much time over the work, and that, besides, windmills were getting out of date. It was tedious to have to wait for a wind to send the old creaking sails whirling round : for often there would be no wind for weeks, so that the grain had to be stacked in the stackyard, and remain there, perhaps, to get damp. Old Heath often whistled in vain for a wind, like a sailor, while his murmuring clients stood round waiting their turn. Well, then, the steam-engine put an end to these delays and to the miller's fortune to boot.

In the second place, Heath had had a quarrel with Dicky Nye, the richest farmer in Sussex, the man whose cows and horses always took the prize at the show, whose sheep were so famed that the Norman farmers used to come over to buy them for mixing their breeds. The quarrel arose first of all over Millicent, whose hand Charley Nye, the farmer's eldest son, had been seeking during vain months and months. He used to come to the mill with his father's great loads of grain, and while the waggons were unloading he unloaded all the harvest of his own heart to Millicent. She heard him idly enough, however, smiling all her negations on him. His burly figure had no attractions, and time after time she told him to have done. Charley persisted; offered her gifts, called her out to the stackyard, came on moon-

light nights to ask her to walk with him over the gleaned fields, and, in short, teased her to pieces, as she said.

Doubtless old Heath would have been proud enough at such a union, but Millicent's mind was made up, and so Charley was told that he must cease to bother her. It was from that day that Nye's great piled waggons ceased to arrive in the stackyard of the Eight Bells mill. Did Millicent begin to miss them and their sturdy waggoner? At any rate, she never saw them trundle in any more, gorgeously heaped. They were sent to the owner of the steam-engine, who ground their loads much faster than ever old Heath could have done. And Dicky spread the quarrel among his own friends, who had thus another motive for abandoning the old miller.

Thus it was that at last the wind was literally taken out of his sails. When he knew what had happened, his wrath was kindled far more against Millicent than against the steam-engine. He had at least the satisfaction of seeing that Millicent winced under his reproaches, whereas the brutal steam-engine would remain placidly indifferent to anything that might be said against it. When, to appease him, she said she would now listen to Charley, and so heal the breach, it was too late. Charley in revenge had married one of his own dairy-maids, who, however, was already giving him, as was said, infinite trouble. It was then that Porlock intervened for the sake of Millicent, who was being driven distracted by her father's curses.

The day the mill was taken from him hardly anyone except law-officers ventured to approach, but at last he was carried, loud raving, to the poor-house, since there was nothing else to be done. As for Millicent, it was only natural that Porlock should endeavour to arouse

Lord Mompesson's interest in her, since the country round North Bayton, and especially the village of Eight Bells, three miles distant, and so named after the ancient inn which had been its nucleus, lived under the shadow of his name. The old lord very heartily concurred, and Millicent was allowed to come regularly to North Bayton to sew the household linen, mend the sheets and pillow-cases, and put new borders on the counterpanes.

Lady Mompesson associated herself in this charity, welcomed Millicent, and found her an excellent needle-woman. Her hem-stitching and embroidery were irreproachable. Such conduct was specially creditable to Lady Mompesson, because she distrusted brunettes. But when Millicent showed herself to be an 'eager recipient of the old lady's tracts, and became thoroughly roused by 'Graye News for Wicked Girls,' of which Lady Mompesson was herself the author, the permanence of the little sewing-maid at North Bayton was finally assured. A room was given her in the south wing, where she could stitch all day, except when her meals were brought up to her, or when she was summoned by Rewbell to receive her weekly wages. She was permitted to carry dishes twice a week to her wretched old father, for whom a cottage might actually be provided by-and-by.

Meantime, she felt thoroughly grateful to her benefactor. The old lord used to chuck her under the chin now and again, and call her a dear creature; and being in sore need of sympathy and protection after her recent troubles, such kindness almost brought the tears to her eyes. Unfortunately, the tears would shortly be brought to her eyes for other reasons as well. It was a degenerate old lord, to be sure, turning foolish and gallant

at that age. In the words of the excellent Burton, who studied these things, it was 'an old acherontic dizzard, that hath one foot in his grave, flickering after a young wench that is blithe and bonny'; and, as he adds, 'What can be more detestable?'

It does seem true that a man's conscience may go to pieces with mere old age, like any other piece of his spiritual furniture. It is in the period of dotage very likely that the soul is in most danger, for it is then that there takes place a gradual encroachment of the unconscious upon its conscious vigilance, and that the human being who has passed through the busy world of moralities, beliefs, and faiths comes eye to eye with the néant and the non-moral and the perishing of the human will. It is indisputable, for instance, that certain old persons reach these strange moral apogees when the soul shares the exhaustion and collapse of their other faculties, and when the distinction of right from wrong, as in the case of this wretched lord, really ceases or becomes as blurred as the distinction of different colours for their eyes. The physiologists know all about it. This is a vast and weird spectacle of withered ethics when Nature enters through decayed gates of reason, and triumphs again over the brief kingdom of moral right which man sets up in this world. Startling forms of diabolism often meet us at the point where the decay of all conscious faculties sets in, and when the old lord took Millicent on his lap, she ought to have known it was the lap of horror.

This old lord could certainly never be our hero, even although he *was* a Justice of the Peace. If the period of spiritual mortification does set in in this manner before the walls of the outer temple have crumbled and

fallen, herein lies the real tragedy of man's struggle against impersonal nature. This is the ludicrously bitter cup given to all thinkers to drink.

It was only now and again, when he was at last warned by Rewbell, who was watching keen-eyed the advance of the spiritual Sodom and Gomorrah within him, that his poor old conscience, like a bad memory, seemed to remember in a kind of vanishing glare life's perished ethics. The helpless old man, indeed, had even ceased to offer a moral problem. He was already being gathered down into the limbo of unconscious, non-moral and vegetative things. It was—for we must come to the point—during the five months when Lady Mompesson and Harold were travelling in India that he seemed to become suddenly busy with some last strange frenzies. When Rewbell got to know it, it was already too late, but when he whispered to him the name of wife and son, the old lord started up now and again in a kind of agony of old memories, and asked where they were. Rewbell had observed, that Millicent could no longer meet his searching eye. She had the appearance of someone who had done something wrong, but for whom the secret was too big and hot to keep. She had given up her visits to her father, and had remained for weeks within doors, feigning illness.

' You are ill?' he asked one day, scrutinizing her with his keen, unblinking eye.

' Yes, Mr. Rewbell, yes,' she said, curtseying, and with that unmistakable thickness of voice which portends immense emotion.

' Ill? Why? You!' he persisted in words of one syllable till she burst into tears.

Rewbell, deciphering her confusion, probed still

\*deeper, whispering one lusty lad's name after another, for he knew them all at Eight Bells. Was it Bill at the Forge, who could throw the hammer further than any fellow in Sussex? or Joe, the stable-boy at *The Eight Bells*, who had broken in fifty horses, and used to get tipsy after every success? It was never Charley Nye, surely? She shook her head, till, in a flash of insight and horror, Rewbell fixed upon the right name.

'For God's sake, Edwin,' said the old lord, when Rewbell urged him and threatened to call in Porlock, 'don't desert me now! I've loved you more than I ever loved Harold, and is this the return? Say nothing to my son, Edwin, dear boy, or to my wife. Never let them know! Take her away; get her married to someone quick, Edwin!'

Rewbell pondered and pondered, and questioned Millicent, and fixed at last upon Nicolay the print-seller in the Strand, his own sister's brother-in-law, a minister man, a man waiting for a wife, but who would probably demand money if he accepted such a wife as Millicent.

'Of course, build them a cottage on the estate—get it done, Edwin, somehow. Never tell Harold! He respected his father once. Dear Edwin, quick, before they come back!' implored the infamous old man, too terrified by these last spasmodic efforts of his conscience.

Nicolay was telegraphed for, visited Millicent and accepted the bargain, and Millicent went trembling into his arms. But with Nicolay came Horneck, or, rather, Horneck pursued Nicolay to the old lord's death-bed, for he never allowed him out of his sight. Also Wharton, Millicent's cousin, had heard what had happened, and told old Heath in the poor-house, who was incon-

solable because his daughter had not visited him for weeks. Wharton used to be the idlest lad in Eight Bells, and many a time the old lord had brought his walking-stick sharp down on his knuckles when he found him idling about the fences as if waiting to snare game. He had enlisted, and been bought out; had thereafter gone to Australia, where he had met Nicolay, but where neither of them had done any good, and had finally come back to Eight Bells with empty pockets. He posed now as Millicent's protector, fought his way to the bedside, and dragged old Heath along with him, into whose ears he poured curses and the tale.

When Wharton saw Nicolay and Horneck he nodded, slightly surprised, but the confrontation of the two old men absorbed all their attention. Old Heath, half deaf and blind, and with his stick in the air, was furiously demanding to see Millicent; while Rewbell kept him from going nearer the bed, and tried to shut his mouth from cursing the dying.

'Ah, my God ! what is this ?' cried the old lord in the unlit darkness of that November afternoon. 'Edwin, deaf . . . boy, what . . . is . . . it ? Who are they ? What have I done to them ? Save me, Edwin. What do they want ?'

'I want my da'ter—my babe !' replied old Heath, approaching the bed as if to attack the dying man.

Nicolay signed to Wharton to take him out.

'You . . . aha ! . . . you shall have a cottage, and you . . . and you . . . and you, aha !' gasped the old lord, pointing at each of them in turn with a finger. 'Edwin, they are all . . . blackmailing me, before God !'

The doctor had arrived, and Rewbell pushed them all out, except Wharton and Heath, who doggedly

remained. Nicolay was safe, however, for a paper had been signed and given to him the day before, and he and Horneck repaired to the Eight Bells Inn to look at it.

'Are they away, Edwin?' asked the old lord.

'Heath and Wharton are here,' replied Rewbell.

'Get them out! I've given them everything,' said old Mompesson, waving his hand.

But Wharton refused to move until his uncle had been provided for; and old Heath, still demanding his daughter, tried to approach the bed again. Rewbell told Heath that his lordship had provided for him the day before, and the old man, half appeased, but still murmuring about his daughter and his mill, left the room, accompanied by Wharton.

Finally, Rewbell had to renew his promises that Harold would never know what had happened; and then the old lord, clutching his hand and calling him Edwin to the last, prepared to die. The aneurism had done its work. It was only Rewbell, Porlock and the doctor who were there at the last. Porlock asked Rewbell in whispers what it was that was tormenting the old lord; but Rewbell shook his head. When the end came, Porlock muttered, 'God help us all!'

As Porlock left North Bayton, wiping the tears from his eyes, and stopping now and again to consider Lord Mompesson's loss, he observed Wharton running towards Eight Bells as fast as he could. It was, doubtless, with the intention of overtaking Horneck and Nicolay. Resting on the roadside near the gate was old Heath, whom Wharton had left behind. He was looking very dogged. His white hair was hanging shaggy under his battered hat, and the ~~broad~~ <sup>thin</sup> contrast of his

helplessness and the defiance on his face startled Porlock as he came up to him.

'Ah, Samuel,' said Porlock, 'his poor lordship is gone!'

Old Heath, however, appeared not to have heard him, and so Porlock bent close to his ear, and said loudly into it:

'Lord Mompesson is dead!'

He then went back a pace to see what effect it would have on the old man, who had so much reason to be grateful to his lordship for all he had done for Millicent.

'Ay, is 'e? He'll 'ave a bulky reck'ning! He beän't wheat anyhow, to be gathered into the barn, but 'e's the tares to be cast into outer darkness to be burned!' replied the fierce old miller.

Porlock reproved him, astonished at his ingratitude, and supposing it due to the fact that the old lord had not saved the mill. He reminded him that each of us should consider *himself* the chief of sinners, and not judge harshly the dead, and especially the distinguished dead, like his lordship, on whose alms half the district had lived.

'Ay, maybe,' said Heath; 'ha, ha, maybe! But I'm wantin' my da'ter Millicent—my ruined da'ter, my harlot da'ter, d'ye hear? She as 'as been liyin' on his alms, d'ye hear? They've married 'er, so they tell me, to hide 'er shame, to a man as has just come from London for the purpose, and 'er helpless old daddy in the poor-house, knowin' nothin' o't, while this traffic in's own flesh and blood's a-goin' on! That's yer lord as is gone to 'eaven!'

Porlock, thinking that the old man had at last gone mad over the loss of his mill, asked him to rise from

the damp roadside, and offered to lead him along. But old Heath resisted him.

• ‘Well, then,’ said Porlock, ‘stop your blasphemies against the dead, Samuel.’

‘I ain’t goin’ to budge till I sees Millicent—that’s what I says,’ replied old Heath, digging his heels resolutely in the mud. ‘It’s allus the poor against the pa’sons and the rich. But I ain’t goin’ to budge! Ask Teddy Wharton, my nevvy, and he’ll let yer know. They’ve married ’er to a man Nicolay, a man with an eyeglass, a man who used to ‘ave a wife in Australia, says Teddy. But Teddy’s a smart chap. Teddy says ‘e’ll see justice done, and ‘e brought me to the bedside of that white-haired villain! You should have seen the terrors o’ ‘im. That was before you came in. My old eyes are still fit to sift good grain from bad. Ay, ay, and ‘e was a-tremblin’ like chaff and tares under wild wind!’

‘Sam, Sam!’ cried Porlock, ‘you are raving.’

‘I ain’t going to budge till I sees my harlot,’ said Heath, still more fiercely. ‘That’s what I says.’

Porlock, at last suspecting something wrong, turned back to North Bayton to see Rewbell. The old lord was hardly two hours dead. Rewbell was sitting at the oak cabinet in his own room, busy among a heap of papers, and sending off telegrams.

‘Look here,’ said Porlock, after the door was shut. ‘Do you know anything about Millicent? Old Heath is raving down there on the roadside, and saying some awful things about the dead. It’s true I haven’t seen Millicent. Where is she?’

‘Ah, it’s out already, is it?’ asked Rewbell. ‘I expected it.. I may as well tell you, then. the whole situation.’

As he proceeded, the tears ceased in Porlock's eyes; and when he had finished, Porlock bent his head towards the ground.

'He has provided for her,' continued Rewbell, 'but I assure you it is an excessively delicate position for me. My last promises were that Lady Mompesson and the young lord should know nothing about it. I have already given Nicolay a cheque, because it was the old lord's orders.'

'Then I shall never marry them,' said Porlock.

Rewbell shrugged his shoulders as if it was no business of his.

'In what capacity are you staying on here?' asked Porlock.

'I am really the estate-manager,' answered Rewbell, 'and must wait on till her ladyship arrives. I don't expect very many at the funeral, because the old lord had quarrelled with almost all his kinsfolk. But doubtless Lady Bevering and Lord Mowhurst and some of the nephews will come.'

When Porlock asked if he could see Millicent, Rewbell said she was shut up in her room, and that as yet Nicolay had visited her only three times, but that the affair was settled. Porlock repeated he would never marry them, but he insisted on seeing Millicent in order to verify these horrors for himself. Rewbell took him to the door, and when they knocked she asked who was there. 'The Vicar!' said Porlock, and Rewbell left him.

When the door opened, Porlock found that she had been sewing a black dress for mourning. Her eyes were full of tears, and because she kept them on the ground the drops fell straight to the floor without wetting

her cheeks. Porlock, remembering the incident of the woman taken in adultery, which is one of the finest in the whole history of practical ethics, took her very gently. But his gentleness only caused the tears to flow faster. Speech was impossible, although he seemed to hear her say that the wickedness of the situation was not her own fault. He asked her if she would go to her wretched old father, who was calling for her at the gates, and she said she would go if her father wished it. Porlock therefore led her down, expecting to witness a heart-breaking forgiveness and reconciliation. But old Heath gave a strange cry when he saw her, and when she came nearer, dragged her by the clothes towards himself without rising, and almost strangled her before Porlock's eyes.

Millicent cried out she was being murdered, and it was with difficulty that Porlock rescued her and took her within the gate. She then fled up the avenue, while Porlock with the utmost difficulty persuaded old Heath to get into his dogcart, which had now arrived. He then drove the master to Eight Bells. As they passed the inn Porlock saw Nicolay, Horneck, and Wharton drinking in the parlour.

'Holloa!' cried Teddy Wharton, and ran out.

Porlock stopped the gig, and told Wharton to take his uncle back to the poor-house.

'What a revelation!' whispered Porlock to Wharton, who replied, with big eyes:

'You bet!'

Old Heath demanded some ale, and Porlock agreed that it was better to give him some, and told Wharton to take him in.

'How is Lord Mompesson?' asked Wharton.

"Dead," answered Porlock.

"By Jove, he's dead, though!" cried Wharton through the window to Nicolay and Horneck, who immediately started up and made for outside.

First of all they took old Heath into the bar, and told him to wait two hours, and then all three started for North Bayton again, discussing Rewbell on the road. Porlock, deep in thought, sat in his dogcart, and allowed his horse to walk back to the Vicarage all the way.

After three days they buried the old lord. All the tenantry turned out to the funeral. Lord Mowhurst, Porlock, Rewbell, Charles Bevering, one of Mompesson's nephews, and Arthur Worley, another of them, were the pall-bearers, while Nicolay, Horneck, and Wharton stood round and nudged each other as the coffin disappeared. Horneck could not allow the thing to pass without a rather unforgiveable joke, and said it was a *sick transit* indeed.

Everyone was now awaiting the arrival of Lord Mompesson and his mother. During the interval Millicent and Nicolay left for London to be married. Horneck remained behind to watch Rewbell, but Wharton went with them. In accordance with the old lord's instructions, Rewbell had handed a cheque to Nicolay, which the old lord had himself signed about an hour and twenty minutes before his death. During Millicent's honeymoon, or gallmoon, as Horneck called it, and while Wharton had not yet returned, Horneck, in high spirits, paid numerous visits to Rewbell, who, however, resented them. He knew that Nicolay had not been able to get quit of Horneck, but he never expected that his persecution of him was so persistent.

Horneck used to come to North Bayton and ask what sort of a fellow the young chap was, meaning Lord Mompesson. Rewbell often refused to see him, but one morning, when Horneck sent up a card saying the affair was urgent, Rewbell came down reluctantly. The affair, of course, turned out to be not in the least urgent; but Horneck actually made Rewbell unconscious that time was being wasted.

'Well, then, ha, ha!' said Horneck, with a smile on his lips, 'it must have been a strange sight, that dotage of the old lord. I've studied dotage. It's then when the garments of conventionality that wrap up the soul begin to wear off, and the soul turns nude. Of course, the soul is nude at any time for the eye that sees it. And there's no painting the human soul unless it's nude. But it results sometimes in far more shocking exhibitions than in painting the human body! Tell me, then—this old dog we have just buried, what sort of an old hound was it? My God! I should have liked to take part in the excavation of his soul. By the time I got up I saw there was nothing left, however. What sort of impression has he fixed in you?' He was fond of you, I hear.'

'Yes, yes,' said Rewbell rather sharply, as if he wished to close the conversation.

'Pooh, pooh!' said Horneck. 'Come now, give me some tips. He was fond of you. I'm infernally interested in everything diabolic. I shake hands with it every day.'

'You mean with Nicolay?' asked Rewbell, perturbed.

'Of course,' said Horneck; 'who but a devil would have closed with such a bargain? You know that I never let him out of my sight. Now, this dog of a Nicolay thinks himself enormously lucky. Once he is

in his cottage here, he supposes I shall leave. My dear man, I wish you to build a cottage for me next his. I shall set up a practice here and bring my blind Harriet, my niece, you know. The air will do her good. That's why I'm so anxious to see the young lord. I wish to become his tenant; do you understand? But I *must* have a house next Nicolay's, and I would like Wharton to be near me, too. You know both of these men were in Australia together, and you know that Nicolay's first wife was my daughter . . . my dear Elsie.'

Rewbell nodded. Horneck put his hand on his heart, while his face appeared to contract with pain. He gave a vast sigh and proceeded.

'Well, then,' he said, 'it is quite necessary that I should live next my son-in-law.'

Rewbell saw at a glance that the conclusion did not follow at all, and that there were other reasons lying behind. However, he did not press for them. He asked what business it was of his? Besides, he felt the oppressiveness of Horneck's presence. He wished, in fact, to get quit of him in the instant even.

Horneck, however, fixed him by a kind of glare just as he used to fix Nicolay, and so Rewbell remained. Horneck then asked about the young lord. Had he been in love yet? What were his tendencies? Could he see his photograph? Rewbell successfully dodged some of his questions.

'Such an extraordinary person as you,' he replied, 'ought to be able to answer all these questions to your own satisfaction by merely looking at the portrait.'

He then handed over a photograph of Harold.

'Yes, precisely,' said Horneck, taking it, and looking closely at Harold's face. 'This young man will be'

bizarre like his father. When this young man arrives at the period of infatuations—the period between, let us say, twenty-one and twenty-five—the period of love's frenzied idealism, to be sure, he will do strange things. Now I see that your fortune is bound up with the fortune of this young lord. 'He has made a friend of you, I suppose—he, too, like his father.'

Rewbell, showing still further signs of astonishment, but still not losing his temper, said that really he had no time to discuss such things. Horneck then went back to the subject of the cottages and Millicent.

'I tell you I shall do absolutely nothing till his lordship returns,' said Rewbell.

'But he is not to know the reason of this munificence of his father,' replied Horneck.

'I shall have to take counsel. His lordship will find that I have done everything in order.'

Horneck, looking keenly at him, and thanking him in the same glance, left for his lodgings at Eight Bells. By the way, that very day was Horneck's birthday, and he was forty-five years old, a tall man, with a rough-hewn and striking, beardless face. His blind niece Harriet, whom he was taking care of in the little lodging in the Strand, sent him a blue scarf that day, which he wore for a long time after.

Of course Lord Mompesson and his mother were hurrying home. The fatal news had reached them on their return journey at Aden. In the midst of her affliction Lady Mompesson indulged in suspicions of Rewbell. How had everything been left? She knew that none of her husband's kinsmen would have been there at the last, owing to the fierce quarrel which had raged between them and her husband for years.

Her sister, Lady Bevering, would have been too ill to take charge, and the nephews were not to be thought of.

'It's all right,' said Harold. 'Edwin's there.'

But that was what she could not believe. Lady Mompesson thought that if Rewbell had taken great liberties during her husband's lifetime, his insolence might become intolerable now that her sentimental Harold had become master. All the way home she warned Harold against him. Harold, however, was bringing back numerous presents for Rewbell, and told his mother that he had no intention of dispensing with him. But when he met them at the station, Rewbell knew by Lady Mompesson's manner all her thoughts about him. Harold, forgetting his new position, ran up boyishly and shook him by the hand, and Rewbell instinctively turned to Lady Mompesson to see what effect her son's charming conduct was having on her. She bowed, scowling, and shook hands only with Porlock, who had come to offer his consolation.

They all drove to North Bayton, respectfully saluted by some of the villagers who had turned out. Lady Mompesson, who wore an enormous thick veil, was hardly ten minutes in the house, when she asked for Millicent, whose duty it was to unpack. When Rewbell informed her that Millicent was married, her surprise was very great.

'How long?' she asked, looking out from the side of her veil.

And when Rewbell replied that it was barely three weeks ago, her surprise increased.

'Harold,' she said, 'Millicent is married! Considering what your father did for her, she might have delayed

her marriage out of respect for his memory. I am astonished !'

She next asked Rewbell where Millicent was, and he told her that she was at present in Eight Bells. Rewbell then gave an account of the old lord's illness and death, while Lady Mompesson wept.

'Did Millicent attend him?' she asked, throwing back her veil altogether.

'Yes,' said Rewbell.

'I hope,' said Lady Mompesson, faltering, 'that she sat up the long terrible nights with him?'

'She did!' replied Rewbell, with the exclamation unseen in his brain.

'Then, send for her,' said Lady Mompesson; 'I must hear everything. Millicent has been strangely ungrateful. She might have postponed her wedding, surely, till I had come home. I hardly know what to think of her ingratitude.'

Millicent came into Lady Mompesson's presence next day excessively perturbed. Her averted gaze had now become a habit, and as she curtseyed to her ladyship, not even her ladyship's dulness prevented her seeing that a vast change had overtaken the girl. In the first place, Millicent's embonpoint was remarkable, and Lady Mompesson, thoroughly shocked, became suddenly aware of the reasons for the hasty marriage. Her first impulse was to dismiss Millicent, as she thought of how such a woman had dared to come near his lordship's death-bed. But as she was anxious to be told about his last moments, she suffered herself to be contaminated.

'You sat up with him?' asked Lady Mompesson with growing resentment.

'Yes,' said Millicent, while her brunette cheeks burned into a fierier brunette.

'Did he leave any particular message for me? What were his last words? Did he mention my name?'

'No,' replied Millicent ruthlessly, 'he didn't, your ladyship.'

'Girl, you must be mistaken,' said Lady Mompesson, much struck. '*Think.*'

'He was absolutely frantic before he died, your ladyship, and made other people frantic too.'

'Frantic? What do you mean, woman? Look at me, and tell me what you mean. How could Lord Mompesson have been frantic?'

'He was, though,' repeated Millicent, with her eyes dry, while Lady Mompesson expected them to be wet. 'He was quite doting, and suddenly lost memory of almost everything.'

'Ah,' exclaimed Lady Mompesson, clasping her hands, 'if I had only been near him, near my Vincent! What could all of *you* do for his sufferings? Do you mean to say he lost consciousness so long before the . . . the end?'

'Yes,' said Millicent, whose monosyllables proved that she was not entering into proper sympathy with her interlocutor.

Her stubbornness, her ill-feeling and coarseness it might be called, became very trying to Lady Mompesson.

'Really, Millicent, what has come over you?' asked the astonished widow, scrutinizing her carefully. 'You are utterly changed. You were married three weeks ago, I hear. I am considerably surprised at your . . . ?'

appear . . . . Really, I am vexed . . . I never expected such . . . such a thing.'

Millicent still remained obdurate, and was evidently impenitent too, which was a strange thing for a young woman who had once eagerly devoured 'Grave News for Wicked Girls.' Nevertheless, when Lady Mompesson reminded her of it, she could hardly help thinking in silence that her ladyship's talent might have been as well exercised in writing 'Grave News for Wicked Old Men.'

'Who is your husband?' asked Lady Mompesson. 'I hear his name is Nicolay, is it not? So now you are Mrs. Nicolay?'

'Yes, your ladyship.'

'But such unions are never blessed, my poor girl! They are founded on the broken Law. He must be a shocking man to have misled you so—a shocking man! Where did you meet him?'

'Here, your ladyship.'

'Here? How here? Was he at North Bayton?'

'He was a friend of Mr. Rewbell's,' replied Millicent.

'Oh! Is he going to stay on here?' asked Lady Mompesson excitedly.

'Yes,' said Millicent, since she had been told that the foundations of her cottage were about to be laid.

'Well, then,' said Lady Mompesson agitatedly, 'I do not see how I can befriend you any more. It would only encourage others to do as you have done. No, Millicent, leave me, please.'

Millicent prepared to leave.

'Stop!' cried Lady Mompesson; 'you have told me nothing about my poor husband. Did he pray?'

'No, your ladyship.'

' You wicked woman, how dare you say so ! Do you suppose my husband had forgotten himself as you have done ? Indeed, it is foolish of me to ask such a person as you such questions. Did he know of your fall ? Did he not guide you ? Did he not take your hand ?'

' Yes, he did,' replied Millicent, suddenly conscious of the sense of irony which the committal of a single sin often awakens in a character once simple.

' Tell me, do you not remember one single thing he said ?'

' Yes, I do,' replied Millicent. ' Once in his delirium he said he saw sins gasping round God.'

" "Sins gasping round God!"' repeated Lady Mompesson. " What a strange, unheard-of phrase ! Ah yes, he was perhaps thinking of your fall, and praying for you. So like Vincent ! I shall try to do so too.'

Millicent then left her ladyship, and went back in terror to Nicolay, Horneck, and Wharton, who were all living together in lodgings at Eight Bells, with old Heath, whom they had taken out of the poor-house.

Meantime, Lady Mompesson unfolded Millicent's story to Harold, urged him to find an explanation of Nicolay's sudden presence at North Bayton, looked with still greater suspicion on Rewbell, and then summoned Porlock to give an account of the moral progress of the district since her departure.

## CHAPTER II

AGAIN WARNS THE READER TO EXPECT NO ROMANTIC  
NONSENSE HERE, BUT A MOST TRAGIC BUSINESS

HAROLD had not been many days at home, when he drove one morning to Eight Bells, and called on Porlock. The girls Muriel and Marjorie, the Vicar's daughters, saw him drive up the avenue, and when he arrived near enough to be seen closely, Muriel exclaimed :

' Oh, hasn't he grown handsome !'

Then, since they were only in their morning frocks, they ran upstairs to put on better dresses, because they expected to be called down to shake hands with the young lord. On both sides of the avenue up which Harold drove, the trees were standing stark naked, waiting for winter, with their high bare boughs lifted like branches of dark coral against the sky. Winter seems to rake everything out of a garden, so that you may see from top to bottom of it. Had it been June, the girls would not have seen Harold until he had been almost at the door, because the Vicarage garden in summer is a dense confusion of apple blossom and green leaves.

Porlock knew that not all the apples which reddened on his numerous trees, or fell ripe on his lawn, were

destined to be piled in his apple-shed. For many an urchin of Eight Bells watched patiently all summer the blossom slowly ripening into fruit, and when the supreme moment of rubicund ripeness came, used to steal in barefooted on quiet September nights, and run lightly over the dark lawn to where the delicious treasure could be pilfered from the trees. But the Vicar shut his eyes to most of those frauds; and indeed once, when Joe, the stable-boy at *The Eight Bells*, had filled a canvas bag by judicious selections from all the trees, and was struggling with it on the blackberry hedge, Porlock, who was concealed on the other side, humorously helped him over with it. Joe was wishing to lay the bag down and run, but Porlock compelled him in a state of much shamefacedness and misery to take it away. When this story had got abroad, the Vicar was less and less troubled by youthful moonlight orchard-robbers. As for the blackberries, they grew thickly on that hedge, and a visitor to the Vicarage in September always expected blackberry-tart at least three times a week for dessert. It was that hedge and an old wall above which it had grown that separated the Vicarage garden from the churchyard and the church. Indeed, Porlock used to say, although Mrs. Porlock never could bring herself to believe, that it is good for a clergyman's family to have the dead for neighbours. Although Porlock was no gloomy man, but rather a man who had drunk many a glass of old port, and hunted many a hunt with the late and terrific Lord Mompesson, yet he had the becoming gravity of his calling. And it was very natural and pleasant for him to believe that to have the dead for neighbours meant having a little company of immortals on the other side of the garden wall! But

*if his wife, a thin little woman who complained periodically about a rheumatism, ever came home at night from a meeting in the church, she always gripped Porlock's arm more tightly as they passed through the churchyard into the Vicarage. She admitted with a smile that she was not quite modern, and felt a slight alarm tremble along her nerves whenever she was out alone among these old tombstones.*

She had been told, not many days after she and her husband had been installed at the Vicarage, that the house was believed to be built on the very spot where human blood had been spilled in sacrifice by the priests of the old pagan religion to which Sussex still adhered long after Christianity had penetrated the other portions of ancient England. Where apple and hyacinth now bloomed there had been altars and fires and old rites. The Vicar's wife thought she had come to an ill-favoured place. At any rate, she was never found picking blackberries too late when the wind, hurrying round the old gray gables of the church, and blowing across the tombstones with a scent of sweet-peas and marjoram, arrived with a sort of wail in the Vicarage garden, sending the leaves trembling and the apples tumbling, and seemed to lift troops of shadowy forms over the hedge and to people the sober lawn with them. And she made sure at night that every door and window was fastened. She thought her husband was a bold man when, to receive keener inspiration, he spent three hours in the silent churchyard one night composing his sermon on the text—"For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised!" There in the sweet moonlight, the gravestones, stretched flat, shine like illuminated missals. And, indeed, it is a very pleasant and

peaceful place when Eight Bells has folded itself to sleep, and night lies low on it and on the marshes and on the downs, and the moon rides high. To be sure, at such an hour the stretched, tired, harmless dead are the best possible neighbours!

And yet there was one among the recent dead whom it was perhaps not pleasant to have as a neighbour. The earth was still brown on Lord Mompesson's grave, and during the time which had elapsed since Porlock had heard the last thud of the grave-digger's spade until the arrival of the widow and the new peer, the very name Mompesson had changed its significance for him. Porlock, to his credit let it be said, was extremely anxious that the lurid secret should remain buried with the dead.

\* It was no longer profitable to speculate on the dark enigma of the late lord's character, or to endeavour to discover the strange vista of vices which might have stretched itself behind his life. Many events, the true meaning of which had long remained hidden, such, for instance, as the hasty visits of the old lord to London and his sudden embarrassments of countenance on his return, seemed now to point to a dark career successfully veiled. And Porlock's reflections on these matters became all the more painful when he remembered that it was the late lord's bounty which had given him the living at Eight Bells. Certainly it was the first time that any serious moral confusion had been introduced into the district to involve members of Porlock's own flock. The fact that the dead man was absolutely beyond control seemed rather to complicate the issues he had left. It was impossible not to keep thinking of Millicent. Luckily, however, Porlock had reason to believe that the knowledge of these terrors was limited. Millicent's long

seclusion at North Bayton, and then her hasty marriage to the mysterious newcomer Nicolay, had prevented scandal. Porlock felt that the district should be still spared the knowledge of it. He felt it was a sacred duty to protect the widow and son, especially the son, from the shock of a revelation which had never ceased to fill him with consternation since he had heard it from Rewbell's lips. So delicate, indeed, was the Vicar's sense, that he had never brought himself to whisper the thing even to his wife, far less to Muriel and Marjorie.

'No,' he had said to Rewbell, 'it will be our duty to cover this up. I shall stand by you. Keep your temper when her ladyship speaks harshly to you about the building of the cottages. Our dear young lord must not be filled with shame and dejection at the very outset of his life! I shall be a witness for the use of these moneys, which I think you are at liberty to spend apart from their lawyer's knowledge.'

It was sweet to see Porlock's earnestness in protecting the youthful soul of Harold. He had already gone to Whaston, and had made that restless young man promise not merely to keep quiet himself, but to watch over and control the fierce old miller, who seemed still waiting to wreak his vengeance on Millicent. He then interviewed Nicolay, whom he found to be a disconcerted, weird, harassed man, anxious to gain a little respect and good will, and eager to promise anything to anyone who seemed powerful. Such a marriage as his had indeed baffled Porlock's moral sense, but he left it alone in his anxiety about other interests. On the whole, it was the darkest thing, taken all in all, that had ever come under his eyes.

The individual, however, who was most of an enigma

to him in the midst of these episodes' was Horneck. He had made inquiries about him in the village, but no one seemed to know what had brought Horneck to Eight Bells. Porlock had noticed one circumstance: Horneck never came to church. Beyond the fact, however, that he was known to be a doctor, and evidently an inseparable companion of Nicolay, and also to some extent of Wharton, two men who were evidently far beneath him in culture and breeding, nothing was known of the stranger.

Porlock, thinking that Horneck had come to protect Nicolay's new interest, went to him and asked him to co-operate in the effort to keep the news from the young lord, much of whose education had been in Porlock's own hands. He was pleasantly surprised with Horneck. The man, who seemed at a distance forbidding and rather terrible, wore a smile on his dark face once friendly conversation was opened with him. He even said that Porlock's solicitude in such a matter was adorably human. . . .

'I have no doubt,' he said, 'you think that sin throws its lurid radius quite widely enough without any of us requiring to hasten the process!'

Porlock, a little struck by the phrase, and looking more closely at Horneck's extraordinary face, said that was precisely his meaning.

'I am sure,' he exclaimed, 'you will agree with me—you, sir, who are a medical man, and must have studied mankind. It would be a piece of intolerable officiousness if we were to thrust down the young man's throat news which might have a very serious moral effect on him. Harold is quite passionate enough, without requiring to know such dreadful news. He might wish

to be no better than his father. Such a fragile thing innocence is, sir ! Perhaps it is the first time in my life that I have really seen the need of our redemption.'

Horneck, looking shrewdly but kindly on him, said :

' My dear sir, I have no illusions about the human soul. In the very essence of it, pitched in the core of it, is some extraordinary poison. How else could it be ? Our knowledge of goodness is possible only because we have a knowledge of evil. This is the horrible paradox which wrecks ethics and has shaken so many brains. Good exists and can be known only because evil exists. Ah, I see I am offending you already. No clergyman can be got to see this easy truth. It is the A B C of moral theory. I have studied the human soul for a long time. I admit it is difficult in these times, when art and religion are in decay, to find a soul at all. Now there is the minimum of soul. I am glad, however, that I have never made money out of it. It is the Church which has made so many millions out of the human soul ! '

Porlock showed signs of bewilderment and shook his head. He had never met a man like Horneck. He shook his head again, rejecting Horneck's paradox, while Horneck smiled the smile of contempt, which unconsciously spread over his face whenever he encountered intellectual mediocrity.

' No, sir, no ! ' replied Porlock. ' I admit this is an appalling and bewildering case. I admit it gives me no rest night and day. But I would not turn right into wrong, and wrong into right, as *you* have done. I do not despair of human nobleness. I feel thankful to our ancestors for having created such a word as " nobleness," and many others like it. They are beacons, sir ! '

'That is charming,' said Horneck, who loved a good talk. 'That is finely said. I always succumb to poetry. I agree with you. But what you do not see is that this rapid light of nobleness moves and shines only because there is darkness all round. The darkness is necessary. We wouldn't be able to think of light without it. My point is that evil seems to be constructive in the universe. A virtue has no meaning apart from its opposite vice. It gains vigour and precision just in so far as its opposite gains vigour and precision. After all, sir, the highest kind of sorrow is the gay sorrow of the thinker who has faced the terrors and sweat of disbelief and the collapse of all gods. I, too, desired to believe, but I suddenly met the diabolic! And I have been on the high seas ever since. Don't you see that in the end all moral judgments are in contradiction with themselves?'

'Well, sir, I only hope,' replied Porlock, 'that if ever chance should throw you in the way of the young lord, you will respect his youth and innocence. These things, you tell me, are the frenzies of the human brain.'

Porlock then left him, aware of his contempt, and speculating on what manner of man he was. He almost felt glad now that such a man never came to church. He hoped that Harold would never come under such an influence. Harold had given the Vicar all his confidences, and it would be dreadful if the boy were now to pass under alien hands. It was strange for Porlock to remember that about the time when Harold and his mother were starting for their Indian trip, the old lord had said to Porlock that, in the event of his death, he hoped Porlock would 'do his best' for Harold; and now

As for Porlock, no mundane gift could make him happier than a gift of cigars.

Harold then spoke to them a little about his travels; but said he must hurry away, as he had to see Wharton at Eight Bells about some horses; so that the numerous questions the girls would have put to him about the prospects of hunting and skating that winter, and whether he was going to town early in the spring, and whether Lady Mompesson would accompany him, and how the new horses he had brought home were doing, had all to be postponed.

Whereas the late lord had had no ambitions in the matter of horseflesh, and had given no serious attention to the turf, Harold was determined to possess a fine stud; he would never be content, indeed, till he owned a racing stable. To be sure, his father had been M.F.H., but when he failed, as he often did, to attend the Meet on a cold winter morning, he used to offer age and infirmity as an excuse. Harold, who was now his successor as M.F.H., decided to fulfil the duties of the office in no such desultory way. He was one of the boldest riders in Sussex, and his own blue roan, a magnificent six-year-old mare, had no rival as a jumper. So that there was no wonder if the young lord, weary of the prolonged tour with his mother, had been anxious to hurry back to North Bayton as soon as he heard that he was now Lord Mompesson.

On the way home he devised plans for the enlargement of his stables, and purchased three young Arab horses. He would ride miles to see a fine horse, and many a morning he was up and away, before his mother knew, to make purchases which would fill her with alarm. Meantime he required a rough rider for

his Arabians, and it occurred to him that Teddy Wharton, who had been in a cavalry regiment, would be quite fit to break them in. He was surprised to find Wharton back at Eight Bells. Wharton told him, however, that he and Nicolay had done no good in Australia, and had both come back to the old country; therefore he accepted Harold's offer with alacrity.

Slim, not tall, shaven, and with sharp eyes, he had the appearance of a jockey, and was just the sort of fellow Harold required. Lady Mompesson had already begun to deplore her son's tastes. In spite of many charming qualities, Harold gave promise of being excessively horsy. He was hardly ever to be seen, indeed, except in riding breeches and gaiters; and, what was much worse, he seemed to take as much pleasure in the company of grooms and stable-men as in the company of Porlock himself, and used to spend hours watching his beasts being rubbed down. Nay, these depravities were still further aggravated, because the degraded youth, forgetful of his position, was once actually found rubbing down his hot horse after he had arrived from a long ride in the afternoon, and had found that all the grooms were out.

In vain Lady Mompesson pointed out that it was Oxford, and not a stable, which should be meantime his goal. She wished her Harold to become a prominent young lord—prominent in the world of distinguished men and women who swarm and talk twaddle in London drawing-rooms, for instance, of whose names our newspapers are full and posterity's will be empty. But he said he had few ambitions that way. She could not understand that to a man in whom the passion for horses has been awakened every other pursuit seems

absurd. An Englishman who can't sit a horse should be ashamed of himself, said Harold triumphantly. And when he went still further in the pleasing exaggeration of youth, and said that he preferred horses to human beings, she thought it was blasphemy. Only a madman like Schopenhauer, at whose name she shuddered, could say things like these; but in his case she had heard it was dogs, if she remembered rightly.

On the whole, it was going to be a lamentable outlook. Harold already talked about racing, and racing meant betting, and betting meant debts, and debts meant the very devil, to be sure! Wharton was to have a good salary. The arrival of new horses from any horse show at which the precipitate youth had made precipitate purchases meant, of course, the arrival of new stable-boys to look after them.

Even Rewbell, who was silently watching these things, once ventured to agree with the old lady's strictures; but when she looked at him shrewdly through her eyeglasses, he knew that it meant simply that he was an insidious plotter anxious to please. There can be no doubt that his chief desire was to remain at North Bayton, and his power of effacing himself was probably the most useful quality he possessed.

But if Lady Mompesson had had greater penetration, she would have seen that he was already jealous of all the new arrivals. For it was not merely Wharton who had found favour in Harold's sight, and had on that account become marvellously pleased with himself. Wharton was the means of bringing Horneck. It happened in this way: Harold had ridden one wet December morning to Wartling Hill, which must be at least twenty miles from North Bayton. He was a hard rider, and

when he arrived at the village inn the steam was rising from his mare in clouds. He let her stand at the door because the stable happened to be full. A farmer, indeed, had offered the stall in which his own horse was accommodated, but Harold, who was in the heyday of youthful idealism, said, 'No, no ; a poor man's horse was not to be treated in such a way.' It was this sort of conduct which made Harold so popular with his tenants and all the countryside. Well, then, his roan was hitched at the door, and stood more than half an hour with only a poor horse-cloth over her, until one of the stalls became empty.

Harold, who was negotiating about stock, rode her back to North Bayton in the pouring rain. But at Eight Bells he saw Charley Nye, and spoke to him on the road a long time about some sheep which were to be removed from the northern downs, where they were too much exposed to the rough winter. He had forgotten, however, that he was exposing his own beloved roan at that moment to too much cold and wet.

Next morning she showed signs of pneumonia, and gradually grew worse. Wharton, who was managing the stables, saw that her appetite had gone, that her breathing was laboured, and that her legs and ears were already quite cold. Moreover, she could not lie down. The inflamed eyes and nostrils completed the signs of a serious attack of pleurisy. He immediately told Harold, who became very dejected. There was no veterinary surgeon at Eight Bells, and the nearest town was twelve miles away.

Wharton suggested that Dr. Horneck might be able to treat her. Rewbell, who had also come down to the stable to look at her, said, with some emphasis, that

Horneck was only a doctor, not a veterinary, and that he could do nothing for the mare. Harold, however, was too glad of the chance, and a dogcart was sent to Eight Bells to fetch the doctor, who came very readily indeed. He immediately set about bleeding the mare, and took about five quarts out of her. He then ordered linseed and aconite.

'Let her have a loose-box, my lord, and get her shoes taken off at once. Keep the stable cool, and give her gruel and hay-tea.'

Harold then asked the doctor to wait all day and all night at North Bayton, in case the mare might grow worse. Horneck readily consented, and was amused when Harold said he intended to 'sit up' with the mare, but rather liked the boy the better for it. He seemed a very generous and open-faced young lord.

Rewbell came down to the stable again, and shook hands with Horneck more warmly than he had ever done before. Horneck told them all that he still hoped to be able to save the mare from broken wind, although broken wind was very often the result of so severe an attack of pneumonia. On the whole, her condition reflected little credit on Harold. Rewbell was surprised that Horneck, instead of giving way to the young lord's opinions on horses, often flatly contradicted him, and told him he was wrong. On the contrary, Rewbell, when he found himself in conflict with his young master, rather insinuated and suggested an opposite point of view than flung it dogmatically down.

Harold, however, took it all very good-humouredly, and was much impressed with Dr. Horneck, who seemed to know everything about the anatomy of horses. In fact, Horneck gave them a short lecture there in the

stable. He selected a colt, and pointed out all the chief muscles which contributed to his swiftness and strength. He surprised the young lord when he told him that the horse is descended from an animal no larger than a hare; that originally he had four toes, but that now his hoof is really an overgrown third toe, which has usurped the place of the others. Harold called for whisky-and-soda, and determined to hear Horneck out. Indeed, Horneck could have taken no surer way of captivating Harold than in talking thus about horses.

The stable was lit with lamps fixed on the walls, and when the light shone on Horneck's face it showed that he was thoroughly enjoying this unconventional meeting with Lord Mompesson. His remarks were broken now and again by the rattling of chains and kicking of feet and various movements and sounds of the horses.

Harold was specially interested when the doctor gave an account of the fossil species discovered in America. And the young lord was not to believe those writers who maintain that no horses existed in America before the Spaniards went there. He then described the horses of Tartary, and came to those of Flanders and Arabia, which have made our English breed what it is. The original British horse which Caesar mentions was a very slim fellow, said Horneck. Our modern hunter, however, is an excellent mixture of Arabian and Flemish blood—a union of strength and speed. It was a remarkable fact, said Horneck, that cross-breeds are sterile, and he warned Harold what to expect if he had any intention of cross-breeding. Horneck then went on to give his enthusiastic listener the history of horse-racing.

'By Jove, doctor, you know everything!' said Harold, delighted.

'Horse-racing began in the reign of James I.,' continued Horneck, 'but not until the time of George I. did it become a national sport.'

Horneck then told Harold about Flying Childers in 1715, who ran 4 miles in 6 minutes 48 seconds, carrying 9 st. 2 lb. Harold thought he had never met such a splendid fellow as the doctor, and looked admiringly at him, while Rewbell and Wharton listened in silence. While Horneck was speaking, Harold now and again rose to look into the loose box to see how the mare was getting on.

'By Jove, doctor!' he said, when Horneck had ended, 'she's lying down now.'

'Well, then, let us leave her alone,' said Horneck. 'It's the best thing for her. Let us go.'

Harold had a disagreeable surprise awaiting his mother that evening because he had invited Horneck to dinner. Horneck excused himself for not being in evening dress, but Harold, who was the least snobbish of young lords, said, it did not matter. Of all the frightful sights of civilization, your lord who is a bounder is the worst. But Horneck had already seen enough of Harold to know that he was free from the follies of caste.

They were both waiting for Lady Monpesson in the dining-room, which is a very rich apartment on which the late Earl spent a small fortune. The permanent oak decorations had cost hundreds of pounds, and, indeed, this is one of the handsomest rooms in the castle. These luxuries sorely reminded Horneck of the extinct splendours of his own family. Sir Ralph Horneck, his brother, had made an extraordinary mess of the estate, and had brought Horneck down along with

him. Indeed, the desire for his past days of comfort and luxury took hold of Horneck that night. The desire for luxury in the human soul is a sort of gross form of artistic feeling, which Horneck confessed he shared. He and Harold were standing before one of the great fireplaces, Horneck's huge stooping shoulders towering above the slim boy, when Lady Mompesson came in. Horneck was surprised at her apparent age. She did look almost like Harold's grandmother, as Mrs. Juxon said.

'This is Dr. Horneck, mother,' said Harold, suddenly presenting the stranger. 'He's been looking after the mate, and is going to stay all night.'

Lady Mompesson, who had not seen him in the dimly-lighted dining-room, gave a little exclamation, which meant bad temper as well as surprise. But she found her hand already in Horneck's, and bade him a frigid welcome. Harold had planned it so that his mother could have no excuse for not sitting down to dinner. Had he presented Horneck in the drawing-room, she might have taken time to show her feeling. As it was, she sat down to table with a pained glance at her son. And, indeed, it was a very frigid repast. A good amount of twaddle had been got through before dessert came. Harold was anxious to keep the talk going, in order that the servants might not see his mother's resentment. Horneck was bored to death. When, however, he made some conventional reference to the late dreadful Earl, Lady Mompesson was touched, and began to speak.

'My husband has left an example to my son,' she said with some dignity. 'It is to be hoped he will profit by it. What do parents live for, indeed, except to carry on their characters in their children?'

'Yes, your ladyship,' said Horneck, 'that is one of the unpleasant two-edged truths which modern science has made plain for us—a truth which intellectual cowards and mediocrities, and the "old women" of criticism, and the nonentities who furnish modern romance, think unfit for discussion. As a matter of fact, character is too often a pure case of spiritual infection, a kind of contagion spreading from parent to offspring, the spiritual microbe which may have been infesting generations.'

'These are theories, sir,' said Lady Mompesson in rebuke, 'in which *I* was not brought up. They are unfit to be discussed either at table or before the young.'

Horneck succumbed, and twaddle was vigorously pursued until the last nut had been cracked. Horneck never could be got to see that small-talk is the divine gift which society sheds on all its devotees. No wonder he said that to have a dull woman as a partner at dinner is perhaps the most remarkable form of torture of which civilization can boast.

Lady Mompesson, thoroughly disliking the stranger, retired, and left her foolish son in company with him. She began to ask herself where Harold had learned his strange tastes, and what it was which drove him to make friends of the commonest types. Harold, however, full of admiration for the doctor, sat with him over coffee and under tobacco-smoke for a long time that night. A message was sent to him from his mother on a card, saying that she had retired for the night considerably upset.

The young lord, therefore, could do nothing but make use of one of those useful social lies which the *désagréments* of civilization have rendered so indispensable.

His mother had a headache, he said. So they passed the evening together, unvisited even by Rewbell, who, indeed, was pacing his room much like a tiger.

Rewbell had an ugly presentiment that the impressionable Harold might become fascinated by the great dark, fascinating, inscrutable man. As Horneck looked into the boy's clear, innocent eyes, he was reminded of Porlock's conversation, and he thought Porlock a very estimable parson indeed for wishing to take care of this youth. Harold kept plying the doctor with questions about his niece Harriet, whom he had mentioned to Lady Mompesson at table, the wonderful girl whose blindness and beauty made such a tragic combination.

'It must be awfully funny,' said Harold, 'when blind people are in love!'

'It is more than funny: it is extraordinary,' replied Horneck. 'When Love has all the senses intact, no doubt he may become a terrible god, a kind of winged voracity! But deny him any of the senses, take from him, for instance, hearing or sight, and the maimed god becomes more terrible still. Poor Harriet!'

'Has *she* ever been in love?' asked Harold.

'Yes,' said Horneck, 'poor girl! groping in vain through the inner and outer darkness. It is a strange, fascinating, dreadful case. I speak to you about it because you are sympathetic, my lord.'

Harold wished to hear further, but Horneck, heaving a vast sigh, said 'No.' Perhaps he would bring Harriet to Eight Bells.

'Oh, do,' said Harold. 'My mother is so interested in blind people.' She is president of a Blind Society. Once a year she invites the blind to come here for tea on the lawn.'

They had become quite friendly by this time, and Harold felt almost glad that the mare had turned ill; otherwise his acquaintance with Horneck might have been too long postponed.

It was when Harold and Horneck, after a final visit to the stable, had gone to bed that Rewbell crept down the great stair to examine the pockets of the doctor's overcoat, which was in the cloak-room. Tomson, the head-butler, stood grinning unseen behind a pedestal as he watched the dexterous man unravel the contents of Horneck's coat. However, there was little that was interesting: a cheque-book, indeed, which Horneck had been careless enough to leave, and on whose counterfoils such small sums were written as filled Rewbell with contempt; a letter signed by the blind Harriet, which had evidently been written for her by a friend; a scrap of poetry, which had been picked out of some newspaper; and, finally, his stethoscope.

Rewbell felt convinced that Harold's boyish ardour for all the old servants at North Bayton, and for himself in particular, would suffer a swift rate of cooling. Horneck had 'bowled him over.' Therefore Rewbell was hardly surprised when the generous young madman told him next morning that Dr. Horneck was thinking of settling in Eight Bells, and was even anxious to become a tenant on the estate.

Certainly, if Rewbell had ever expected that the presence of Nicolay meant inevitably the presence of Horneck at Eight Bells, he never would have proposed such a man as a husband for Millicent. He knew, indeed, that Nicolay had married Horneck's daughter, but he did not know that after her loss Horneck drew still closer to his son-in-law. He kept wondering what

the man's motives could possibly be, and why North Bayton had become of sudden importance to him. It was when Harold, full of gratitude to the doctor for having saved the roan, asked him the amount of his fee that Horneck, smiling, shook his head, saying that there was to be no fee at all for such a trifle.

'But, my lord,' he continued, 'I was meditating settling down on this pleasant spot, and if your lordship could build me a small house on a good site, next to Mr. Nicolay's, for instance, whose cottage is going to be very charmingly situated, I would be delighted to become your tenant.'

Harold, who had seen a great deal of brick and mortar accumulated for Nicolay's and Wharton's cottages during the last week or two, thought it would be a capital plan if the doctor could have his wish fulfilled, and agreed at once. The late Earl had not built half enough. In short, he promised the doctor that he would take steps at once. And so Horneck, after having given some last instructions about the mare, left very pleased with the young lord. Wharton drove him in a dogcart to Eight Bells.

'Well, then, you've got at last what you wanted, doctor,' said Wharton, picking up the reins while Rewbell watched them drive away. .

'Yes, yes,' replied Horneck, 'but I intend to pay Lord Mompesson a good rent. These brick cottages take a very short time to be run up. Mine shall be ready almost as soon as that other blackguard's! Tell me now, really, did he . . . did he show Elsie the least sign of love all the time you were with them in the Bush? My God! tell me what were her last words. Had she no message for her poor father?'

'How can *I* know? I had left them three months before it happened. I came down to Brisbane, you know, and left them up in the Bush. How often have I told you the same thing?'

'Ah, my God! has there been any foul crime? Has there been anything nefarious? My Elsie! Elsie! Elsie!' cried Horneck, shaking himself excitedly.

Wharton tried to quiet him, because he seemed to be wishing to jump out of the dogcart.

'Stop, doctor!' he cried, 'calm yourself!'

'Ah, yes, you are right,' said Horneck. 'I shall try. But that dog of a Nicolay!'

'I tell you that Rewbell will oppose your plan of getting a cottage built next to Nico's,' said Wharton, who generally referred thus to his late companion in the Bush, 'and perhaps the young lord 'll give in. *I've* been jolly lucky.'

Horneck, however, seemed lost in thought, and did not hear him. They had now arrived at Eight Bells, and after putting the doctor down at Mrs. Ashbee's, Wharton drove back to North Bayton. But it was not the last day, or night, either, which Horneck was to spend with Harold. Far from it. Harold had asked the doctor if he liked a ride, and Horneck very readily accepted the use of one of the horses. But he ventured to ask the young lord if Mr. Nicolay might also be allowed to accompany them, and Harold willingly agreed. Indeed, there were now at North Bayton more horses than riders, and Harold felt obliged if some of them could be thus taken out for exercise every day. Horneck therefore compelled Nicolay to ride out with him, and Harold, always interested in his beasts, often accompanied the two strangers along with Wharton. Rewbell, who was

a physical coward and could not ride, used to watch the young lord go off with the three men, and Harold began to be surprised at his bitterness against Horneck and Wharton, but especially against Horneck.

To be sure, any rider would love that part of Sussex. It is a vast plain reaching in soft undulations to the marshes or low levels which form an open valley stretching towards glimmering horizons. All day, except when the clouds move like slow tides across the sky, it is a great valley of light. The downs towards which it rises on the western side afford, indeed, no very numerous hazards in a hunt, and it is not until the low-lying country is ridden over that true sport begins, hedge and ditch, ditch and hedge, succeeding each other in endless succession inland. And too often the accursed barbed-wire fence, unseen by the horse, who does not calculate sufficient height for the jump, brings horse and rider down.

When, however, the harvest fields are cleared and the winter turnips are already lying full-bellied above-ground, a glorious autumn hunt may be had by anyone who, like Harold or Wharton, takes high jumps. At every meet, indeed, Wharton was now to be seen in attendance on Harold, and Dr. Horneck and the wretched Nicotay also came. On the limitless downs which rise there high above the sea, the severest test of horse and horsemanship is the rapid trot down precipitous grassy slopes. Those plains are like a vast playground for the sun. Mile after rolling mile of soft turf threaded by the white road which leads from Eight Bells, past North Bayton to the village of Seadown and the sea—this is a country to gallop across with loose reins! Numerous sheepfolds are scattered over the

downs, and the shepherds may be seen folding the sheep every evening just about the time when the goat-herds in Italy are driving home *their* tinkling flocks. For all pastoral countries have the same immemorial peace and slow routine. Here, indeed, in August the sun is almost as fierce as he is in Sicily, and uses these plains like a vast sun-dial to mark the movement of his fierce fugitive light. But there are no woods in which the plaintive Pan-pipes may be heard, nor any little streams to go trembling to the sea. There is no water except from wells. Also these wide uplands are bare.

Except at North Bayton, where there is a great wall of old oaks to protect the gardens, the downs are treeless. Over them a wind blows pure out of the sea. Horneck, who had studied climates, said that North Bayton was encircled by unmatched air. He congratulated Lord Mompesson on being master of these limitless fields. No wonder, he said, that Harold, who had been mostly brought up on them, was full of health and vigour.

From North Bayton it is a walk of about a mile and a half towards the dizzy cliffs—dazzling, bewitching cliffs, at whose base roars the sea. There poise the seagulls as white as the cliff chalk, and there even the crows come searching for dead fish like poor tide-waiters unable with their white rivals to venture out into the deep. Their caw-cawing may be heard all day, mixed with the sounds of breaking waves and spilling foam. These cliffs are a sort of miniature Alps, sea-drenched and sea-cleaned. Below, the shore is rock-built to break tides, and in dark night the foam may be seen stretching restless arms round the earth. Indeed, at night, when, as Böhme says so wonderfully, 'the earth becomes

## NUDE SOULS

hungry for stars,' and when the sea-birds have left the land and gone to their swinging home, and the land-birds that had ventured out during the day have come back for sleep to the sure earth, their mother, these uplands become a great immeasurable plain of soft darkness and dream and limitless twilights.

It was no wonder if Horneck, weary of his battle with the world, should seek a refuge on these large downs. But it was strange that he owed his discovery of them to the man with whose life was bound up the secret and mystery which had shattered his own. Nicolay, thinking to escape from Horneck, had at once complied with Rewbell's suggestion that he should take over the fallen Millicent, and the fact that she was bringing not only a dowry, but actually a roof above her head, hurried him into the grim bargain. He little expected that Horneck would follow him to Eight Bells. The wretched man, now daily tormented by the doctor's presence, was almost tempted to flee from Millicent and her dowry and her sin.

Meantime, Horneck began to think that he might set up a practice at Eight Bells, and spend his last days in tolerable ease. The village doctor had died a few months ago, and his place was not yet filled up. This project of Horneck's filled Nicolay with alarm. He was to be tormented, then, not merely by the presence of Wharton, who had been with him in Australia, and knew a good deal about him, but also by the doctor, whose eyes seemed to search out every possible motive which could urge a human being to every possible crime. Whenever Nicolay saw Horneck and Wharton together, he felt sure they were speaking about him, and used to break into a cold sweat.

Let not the reader suppose for a moment, even, that it was because he felt pleasure in the company of those two men that Horneck kept near them. No, it was because one of them wholly knew, and the other only partly, perhaps, the history of Elsie's loss that he found a certain fascination in keeping them beside him. They had been the last to speak to her. They had no doubt heard her cry out *his* name at the end. Thus, it was rather strong self-control which enabled Horneck to go on living with Nicolay, Millicent, and old Heath, who stayed at Mrs. Ashbee's while the cottages were being built.

Various motives, however, conspired to keep 'him patient.' First of all, he was worn out and wrecked by his failure to create a great London practice after his brother's bankruptcy had left him in the lurch, and had caused him for the purpose of livelihood to make use of knowledge which he had acquired out of the pure love of science. As a young man, Horneck had studied medicine and had taken a degree. Again, his blind niece Harriet, the last creature he was struggling for, was being suffocated in London, and needed fresh air. He would bring her to Eight Bells. Lastly, of course, Nicolay was here, and that was the main motive of all.

For such an observer as Horneck, indeed, Mrs. Ashbee's lodgers offered a very curious sight. To begin with, there was old Heath, who, whenever Millicent came into the room, could hardly be kept from attacking her with any weapon which came to hand. More than once Horneck and Nicolay had great difficulty in holding him down. Millicent said she could hardly sleep at night because she expected to be murdered. It was a cold winter, and the selfish old man

always seized the best corner near the fireplace, which, indeed, Horneck readily surrendered to him. He used to sit there and watch the fire for hours, blazing up and dying down, and blazing up again as he threw on fresh logs. In his dreams of dotage, he appeared to see the lost mill in the flames, and cried out in his wild incoherence that they were burning his mill. Then he would see Millicent, and say that it was his 'harlot da'ter' who had done it all, and rise and attempt to seize her to throw her on the fire. When she escaped him, he pursued her with oaths in his toothless mouth, and other mumbling clatter of his dotage.

Horneck was an amazed spectator, and used to think that the trash which passes for romance would never be written, far less be read, if people really looked into the soul to see where its diabolism sleeps. As if the human soul is anything except good and evil, God and devil, mixed inextricably up! Well, then, Millicent, when Mrs. Ashbee asked her why her father was so 'terrible wild,' could only sob.

'It's yer weddin',' said the excellent Ashbee, suspecting nothing whatever. 'It's as clear as daylight that it's the weddin'. He beän't pleased with yer husband. That's it! He might surely 'ave some pity when ye're expectin' yer baby every week!'

Horneck, indeed, had promised to be kind to Millicent when the awful hour came. Meantime he could not help noticing that she hated her husband who had rescued her in disgrace, and had disgraced himself by doing it. Really, what sort of happiness was possible for these two? A maniacal future was before them. The lean Nicolay, eyeglass and all, was certainly a lamentable figure, and when Millicent at last

opened her eyes to see the sort of man who now possessed her, she almost shrieked against the soreness of her punishment. There are human beings who appear really not to be human. This man was one of them—a rag of a man, over whom the fever of the Australian Bush had swept, and had punctured his skin in such a way that he seemed now only like the crumpled semblance and caricature of a human being.

This was the man who, when he came home from Australia eight months after Wharton, and brought news of Elsie's death, had wept on Horneck's arm, and had pressed his hand, saying that he could hardly live without Elsie. Six weeks had passed, and now Millicent and her dōry and her sin had all become his. He noticed that Horneck was asking more questions about Elsie than formerly—the exact date of her death, the exact symptoms of her illness, her exact last words, the place of her burial. How terrible it was to have to look into Horneck's blazing eyes and repeat these details day after day!

Nicolay had brought home a sprig of the blossom of the golden wattle-tree at the foot of which he said he had buried his Elsie, and Horneck put it in a little linen bag, and wore it next his heart. For the love of his daughter, his own darling, as he murmured night after night, with his eyes full of tears, had meant for him his last great idealism. To be sure, he was a good uncle to Harriet, but the blind Harriet could never surely take the place of the lost radiant Elsie.

When he used to ask Nicolay to go for a walk, the perturbed man generally made an excuse, such as that he wished to remain with his wife. He pretended to be in love with his wife. He wished, he said, to pass all the time

with her. As if Millicent didn't loathe him out and out! It was grim to see the way in which old Heath glanced at Nicolay when he asked him about his first marriage and his former wife, Horneck looking on. Nicolay began to grow restive indoors in the company of his two abhorred fathers-in-law, and sometimes would start out on dark winter nights for a drink at *The Eight Bells*. Altogether, Mrs. Ashbee began to think that these were the strangest guests she ever had taken in. Now and again Horneck would break out into a great hearty laugh in the parlour over some episode in the relations of Millicent and Nicolay. But he was the only one who laughed.

On the other hand, Wharton was the only one who seemed to be making any progress. He had very much cooled in his ardour of cousinship, and thought now that Millicent richly deserved her fate. He had even lost interest in Horneck's persistent search into Nicolay's character. He was interested only in his own advance under Harold, and in his prospect of ousting Rewbell, whom he detested.

Porlock, indeed, need hardly have troubled himself to tell Wharton to keep Millicent's red secret. If ever the truth came to Harold's ears, Wharton was afraid that shame might make him cast them all off and bring in a new set. So that when the old miller still threatened to go to Harold and find out all the truth for himself, Wharton said he would put him in the poor-house again. Indeed, he suggested the step already. Nicolay, however, wishing to win favour all round, offered to take the old man as soon as Millicent's cottage was ready. But in that case Millicent declared she would never enter it.

Meantime, at North Bayton preparations were being made for Harold's coming of age. Lady Mompesson had decided that since her husband's death was still poignantly recent, the celebrations were not to be on any "large" scale. There was to be no dancing, for instance, but a large dinner or supper would be provided for the tenantry, and afterwards there might be some music. She had invited her sister, Lady Bevering, with Adelaide and Vincent, Harold's cousins, and Lord Mowhurst, her brother, whom she expected to act now as a father to Harold. She felt, indeed, that the sooner the boy came under Lord Mowhurst's influence, the better. She had had long talks with Porlock, who agreed with her that Horneck seemed to be a dangerous man. And when the news came that Harold had actually granted a plot of ground on which a cottage was to be erected for the doctor, Lady Mompesson and Porlock were filled with consternation. Rewbell was summoned because it was he, as Lady Mompesson told Porlock, who had brought Nicolay to North Bayton and encouraged Harold to set about building houses for him and Wharton.

'And that man Nicolay,' continued her ladyship, 'is the brother-in-law of Rewbell's sister, a needy creature who has suddenly appeared here and married that fallen girl Millicent, whom, it seems, he first betrayed. Else how otherwise can she be giving birth to a child already? I am sorry, dear Vicar, to have to speak about these things, but it looks as if there is some conspiracy against us. And my son goes on trusting Rewbell, and bringing absolute strangers into this house, and setting them down even at my dinner-table.'

Porlock bent his head as he endeavoured to discover

a suitable reply.—Presently, however, Rewbell came in, and Porlock heard Lady Mompesson question him vigorously on the subject of Horneck's cottage. Rewbell, pale and still soft-tempered, said he had had nothing to do with it; that, on the contrary, he had a poor opinion of Dr. Horneck, and had advised his lordship against him. His lordship was free, however, to bestow gratuities of brick and mortar on whom he pleased. When Lady Mompesson, very agitated, mentioned Nicolay, and asked if he was not a friend of Rewbell, the manager unconsciously looked towards Porlock.

'We shall see Lord Mowhurst—we shall see Lord Mowhurst,' said Porlock twice. 'Leave it to us, my lady.'

While she thanked him, still in great doubt, she added, with a glance at Rewbell, that she intended to consult her lawyers, Leaf and Merridge. She felt convinced that it would not be long before Harold would be in debt. And, indeed, even Rewbell had hinted to him that he was spending too much. He asked the young Earl to come to examine some accounts one afternoon, but before he had got through half of them, Harold pushed them aside, and told Rewbell to look after them. It was then that Rewbell, after having told his master that the account at the Lewes bank would require to be overdrawn to meet his recent betting failures, strongly persuaded him to give up Horneck. Who was Horneck? An utter stranger. He then spoke bitterly against him, till Harold was astonished. But Rewbell went on to question the doctor's motives, and did so with such skill that for a moment Harold's faith was shaken.

It was a very extraordinary request for the doctor to

have made,' said Rewbell. He warned Harold to be careful. His position and his youth invited all sorts of harpies.

'But why can't the doctor be my tenant as well as Nicolay *your* friend?' demanded Harold.

'Because,' replied Rewbell, 'we've enough on hand at present without taking on more. You will excuse me, my lord, if I say that I really happen to know more about the working of this estate than even your lordship. I served your lordship's father for more than twelve years. If you are not as pleased with me as he was, however, I can go!'

'Not a bit, Edwin,' said Harold. 'But Dr. Horneck's going to live beside me, that's all!'

'Very well, my lord,' said Rewbell calmly; 'I will now speak to you on another small matter. Mr. Wharton has asked an advance on his wages—a considerable advance: fifty pounds.'

'Oh yes, give it him,' said Harold.

'I am sorry to say that Mr. Wharton scarcely deserves it. He was almost drunk the other night, and when I found fault with him, next morning, he spoke very insolently. He is only a miserable, low-bred jockey.'

'You don't take him the right way, Edwin,' said Harold; 'Teddy's all right.'

Rewbell then desisted, and left the young lord to his illusions.

But Lady Mompesson, believing that everything centred in Rewbell, implored her brother, as soon as he arrived, to order him out of the house, or at least to compel Harold to do it. She told him that Harold was indeed behaving very foolishly, buying horses and

engaging jockeys and surrounding himself with strange men.

• Lord Mowhurst, calming his sister, said it was, after all, better for a young fellow to surround himself with strange men than with strange women. On the subject of women, however, his lordship had a remark or two to make to his sister. He considered that Harold was in a peculiarly dangerous position. A passionate, headstrong, generous youth, who would now have a great deal of wealth and power put into his hands, would very likely be turned head over heels, as his lordship said in his homely way, as soon as he fell in love. He warned his sister that she would probably soon lose him, although, indeed, she feared that she had lost him ready. Why not, therefore, get him safely married at once? Look at Adelaide, his cousin. Could there be a better girl? Keep the estate in the family. Bring no damned strangers in. Nothing was easier than to marry cousins. The existing intimacy served as an excellent beginning, and the match was really more than half complete before it was begun! But Lady Mompesson thought that her brother's plan was dangerously premature. She had hardly made up her mind for such a thing. She had never considered Adelaide in such a light at all. Harold was still a boy. Rather, she urged her brother not to fill the boy's giddy head with anything as giddy as a love-match yet. Doubtless Harold required looking after, but she trusted to Providence.

Lord Mowhurst was one of those old gentlemen whose exhortations to young men to avoid brandy might have a chance of being listened to if their own noses were less red. He was bald, moreover, and had

a beard growing down both sides of his face, and stopping suddenly on each side above the chin. He wore peaked collars very open at the throat, and was seldom seen without a coloured waistcoat.

As a boy, Harold used to dread his visits. His threats to cane him, which Harold had always taken in dead earnest, used to be preceded by : 'Now, my boy, what have you been up to ?' And although times were changed, and Harold was now master in his own domain, he still felt shy when he had to face his uncle. Almost the first words Lord Mowhurst said to him were, 'Well, boy, what have you been up to ?' and Harold felt that they were absurdly out of place. But Lord Mowhurst lost no time in letting his nephew know that he was surprised at the follies he had committed since he had succeeded to the title.

'Demn it all ! be careful, sir ; you don't know the world,' said Lord Mowhurst, fixing Harold through his eyeglass. 'Why, you're going back to school, aren't you ?'

Harold threw up his head in derision, and when Lord Mowhurst insisted on going to the stables and seeing all the new horses, the angry boy muttered something about 'd——d interference !' It was lucky that some of the colts were in the paddock, but Lord Mowhurst saw enough to make him rate the headstrong boy very roundly on his extravagance.

'I've been hearing about your wild riding, too,' he said. 'Want to break your neck ? Want to go over the cliffs ? I suppose you're the sort that leaves his spurs in his horse's sides when he dismounts—eh ?'

Harold said his mother had been exaggerating everything. But Lord Mowhurst had not finished. He

Began to speak with some warmth on the subject of Harold's new friends, about whom his mother had been saying vigorous things. What had a Mompesson to do with a Horneck?

'Your mother has told me all the nonsense about cottage-building, too. Let the thing cease, sir, or you'll bring your estate down about your ears. These are demned hard times! Besides, get quit of that clear-eyed panther, Rewbell. He'll eat your vitals yet. Don't like him. Bad lot!'

'What's wrong with Edwin?' asked Harold with growing resentment. 'He served papa ten years.'

'Yes, but now takes advantage of youth and ignorance. What do *you* know about villainy? Back to school, boy!'

When Lord Mowhurst saw that he was making no impression on Harold, he determined to tackle Rewbell alone. He went to Rewbell's room. The pale secretary, however, told him that it was not immediately convenient, and asked him to put it off for a day. Mowhurst thought it all very 'demned impertinent for an underling.' But Rewbell was taking the precaution of having Porlock as a witness; and so when Lord Mowhurst came again, Porlock was there to meet him.

Rewbell knew that the cottages were to be the matter in hand. He disclaimed any responsibility for Horneck's friendship with Harold, and then allowed Porlock to unfold to the astonished lord the claims of Millicent and Nicolay on the estate.

'I am, unhappily, in a position,' said Porlock, 'to unfold to your lordship an awf . . . an inhuman . . . a perfect nightmare, my lord.'

Lord Mowhurst fixed his eyeglass, and listened atten-

tively. He interrupted Porlock now and again by ejaculations like 'Eh!' but at the end remained speechless. Porlock expected to see him much more excited. His lordship, however, simply said, 'Indeed! Thanks. Half expected it. I agree. Better keep quiet.' And then he went off, and told his sister that Rewbell wasn't such a bad lot, after all, knew all about the estate, and had better be left where he was. At any rate, in the midst of the rejoicings for Harold's coming of age, it was well to forget these small irritations.

Lady Mompesson, thoroughly astonished, accepted the advice for the moment, and continued her preparations for Harold's birthday.

In a few days all the tenants, Horneck and Nicolay among them, to be sure, were gathered on the ~~hill~~ to congratulate Harold. Muriel and Marjorie, Porlock's daughters, were there; but their joy in the proceedings was slightly diminished by their consciousness of the superiority of Adelaide Bevering's dress. Their dresses were cloth, whereas hers, it seems, was made of brocade silk. Moreover, she had a sable cape and an exquisite hat. What was worse was that, according to rumour, it was she, beautiful and lucky, who was destined to marry Lord Mompesson. More occupied, therefore, with their private miseries than with the events they were celebrating, Muriel and Marjorie listened very inattentively to their father's speech.

Porlock was busy presenting a service of plate to Harold on behalf of the tenantry, and in his speech he said 'it was a very auspicious occasion indeed.'

Harold replied, and when he mentioned his father's name with visible emotion, Lady Mompesson was also discovered with a handkerchief at her eyes. Harold

'said that, God helping him, he would do his duty by them all as his beloved, never-to-be-forgotten father had done.

Wharton, who was standing between Horneck and Nicolay, nudged both of them ; but as soon as Harold had kissed his mother, whose eyes were now wet with happy tears, Horneck was the first to lead off the great shout of applause which greeted the graceful and manly act. It was plain, as Porlock remarked, that everyone went home convinced that Harold was a very promising young lord.

## CHAPTER III

HOPES THAT ALL PERSONS SNIFFING FOR WHAT THEY CALL ROMANCE WILL BY THIS TIME HAVE LAID THE BOOK DOWN, AT LAST CONVINCED THAT THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NONE OF THE EXQUISITE DRIVEL HERE

WHO<sup>°</sup> was Horneck? To begin with, he was a man who had had a great struggle in his attempt to make a living in London: for it is often the man most highly endowed who finds most difficulty in fighting his way. He fights his way to great ideals and other such dim goals, no doubt, but what do *they* matter? Finânce and arithmetic matter. And, to be sure, it matters much more that a man should go through' the world with a clean shirt and a polished boot than with a polished brain. Unfortunately, however, Horneck's shirt-cuffs were not always clean, nor his boots always polished, in those earlier days of his penury, when he used to walk the Strand, or gaze at it in admiration from his little window high up. The edges of his silk hat were frayed, and its soiled and greasy lining was the sure sign of poverty. He carried gloves which were the caricature of gloves, and, indeed, painful symptoms of ill-luck spread themselves too visibly all over his gigantic person.

The worst of it was that Horneck did feel these things keenly, because his upbringing had been refined. He just stopped short of being a complete philosopher (to whom comforts are said to be unnecessary), possibly because his senses and his tastes were highly developed. Thus, when ruin overtook him he might easily have attempted to gain food for his daughter and himself by finding some menial work in an office or a shop. In his first despair this idea even suggested itself to him.

But the man was too proud, or at least, too fastidious to give himself up to the thousand mean horrors which oppress and degrade the lives of those who succeed in winning only their daily bread. No. With a few hundred pounds which had been saved out of the disaster that his brother, Sir Ralph, had brought about, the doctor decided to make use of the science which as a young man he had acquired out of pure love of it. The only thing he had really studied at Cambridge had been medicine and surgery, although, indeed, he had never expected to make much practical use of either of them. He had done work in a hospital, but he had been driven there only by his interest in the human body. And he used to say that only those who look closely at the human body can know anything about the human soul. His mistake, of course, was that he loved knowledge for its own sake. The foolish man turned away from money and the pursuit of it. Thus, while he could amputate a leg scientifically enough, he might not know the exact fee he ought to charge for the operation. When, however, ill-luck at last overtook him, he was compelled to think about making money; otherwise he and Elsie would perish. And so he set up his brass

plate, with 'Dr. Horneck, Surgeon,' engraved on it, on a doorpost in the Strand. He hoped it would bring him a little good fortune.

Although, of course, it was perhaps the worst and most unlikely place he could have chosen, it was characteristic of the man to fix upon the most interesting street in London, this multitudinous street overrun all day by strange modern hosts, the street most full of the horrible earnestness of modern life which has turned this gleaming world into a Babylon of trade. It is here, at any rate, that half the psychology of London is to be found. And it was here that Horneck studied the features of what he called the modern face.

The best proof of the reality of spiritual things is that the various ideals the world has had have had expression in the human countenance. The modern face is essentially of the commercial caste. The artists and poets are all wrong, it seems, for the universe does exist to be exploited, and the supreme science is arithmetic. It would be interesting, therefore, to look closely at the human face as it has been gradually moulded by trade and the cunning of commerce.

The Strand and Cheapside are full of shrewd enough eyes, but not noble lips. Horneck, however, thought there was a certain ghastly beauty in the face of modern cunning. On the contrary, that remarkable man, De Stendhal, says severe things about the commercial caste of face, which he distinguishes from all others by its brutality. The love of money, he thinks, devastates the human face as no other passion does. And he says, in his forcible way, that the mouths of rich men are generally hideous (*d'une atroce laideur*).

Horneck thought this was exaggerated, but he

admitted that, if the face of the lost chivalries will ever reappear in the world, it will be because of militarism, which has always produced a gay, proud face. Well, then, when the sun used to light up' the Strand on a spring morning, what a moving gallery of strange faces for Horneck to see—faces full of modern beliefs and un-beliefs!

Always restive indoors, and too irritable to wait for patients who never came, he would issue forth to take his walk up to Ludgate Hill and back to Trafalgar Square like a kind of defiant Socrates, intensely interested in the stir of the streets and their picturesque beauty and confusion. He loved to gather their raw psychology. The weather-beaten churches, symbols of weather-[redacted] St. Martin, Ludgate, and the solemn mass of St. Paul's, which makes one rejoice in old Wren's magnificence of brain, and the vast Law Courts, which seem as full of labyrinths as the Law itself, rise up from the pressing, eager street, as if to remind it of life's ideal kingdoms and their adorations. What is life, they seem to say, but a gangway and narrow pass to more mysterious altitudes! But the multitude hurries past, unconscious that *it* is the raw material of all idealism, or that *it* is its terrors and hopes, its crimes and its charities, which have raised temples and tribunals.

Horneck, however, could hardly afford to dream over human nature in this way., It was all he could do to pass a bookshop, and many a time he fingered lovingly some book he hungered for, although he generally came away bitterly without it. He had the severer task of making a living. After his walk he used to come back and fling himself in dejection into his chair.

'Any callers, Elsie?' he often asked, but she had as often to reply, 'No, father, not one!'

Day after day passed, but no callers came, and it was a great pain to Elsie to see the huge man brooding for hours in a corner of the little room. It looked as if his London project was going to fail hopelessly. Ever since her mother's death Elsie had attempted to fill the vacant place for him. She was now nineteen, tall, with a pale face and dark, thoughtful eyes which she had inherited from her father, and her rich head of hair was as black as his. He had practically educated her from the time she used to sit on his knee. She used to sit on his knee even now, to be sure, but that was to comfort him. She knew that his chief chagrin was that he could not afford to bring in ~~an expensive lady~~ ~~she had never seen~~ she was better educated than most ladies are, she had to wear cheap dresses and cheap lace, and had also to devise many pathetic little subterfuges to conceal her needs from him.

Nothing, surely, would ruin the appearance of any lady more than cheap lace. Horneck had hoped to see her well married, but how was the thing possible now? It looked rather as if the time would shortly come when she would require to work, not merely for herself, but for him as well. His health was giving way. And, indeed, Elsie had already begun to put her drawing to some use. She could draw well. She thought she might paint little pictures—reminiscences of the Yorkshire village in which she had been brought up—or attempt some sketches of life in London streets. Perhaps she would succeed in selling them for a few shillings.

On the opposite side of the street was a print-shop,

and in the window she had seen, besides drawing materials, paint-brushes and palettes, various coloured prints and engravings, and some pictures newly painted and evidently for sale on commission. On the sign-board above the shop was the name 'Joseph Nicolay, Print-seller.' Every morning she saw a man of medium height, who wore an eyeglass and was rather well dressed, arrive at the shop door about half-past seven, open it and go in. An assistant used to arrive shortly after, and begin to take the shutters down, sweep the pavement and clean the windows and its brass fittings.

Elsie suggested to Horneck that she should begin drawing and painting, and he encouraged her in the project. She pointed to the shop opposite, in which ~~she could doubtless~~ find all she needed. So that when he gave her a few shillings, she crossed the street one forenoon, and entered Nicolay's shop. At the back there was a parlour, with a window which was covered with transparent coloured paper to imitate stained glass, and when the door which separated the two portions of the shop stood open, a subdued warm light penetrated the place.

The shop was well stocked with engravings, easels, canvases, tubes of paint, brushes, reams of drawing-paper and tracing-paper, coloured panels, pencils, artists' stools and satchels, together with other necessaries of the same kind. Moreover, Nicolay had a good stock of reproductions of the season's successes which were in demand, such as those unmistakable, immortal and thoroughly stagnant works of academic commonplace which succeed in only filling a few of us with consternation. For those things, like ~~Sri Basanti Ballal~~, <sup>Sup</sup>~~Basanti Ballal~~, But Nicolay, at any rate, should have ~~had~~ <sup>been</sup> ~~signified~~ <sup>signified</sup>

such painted platitudes, because, had it not been for their steady sale, he would have been compelled to shut shop much sooner than he did. At this time Nicolay was a much more favourable-looking man than he appeared to be after the fever of the Australian Bush and the terror of the memory of his crime had made such havoc of him. On the whole, he seemed a very respectable individual, with just that touch of caution and mute cunning in his face which business, carried on even on the smallest scale, seems able to produce.

As he stood behind his counter selling the multifarious objects out of which he made his living—a thin, pale, and rather hollow-voiced man—his customers doubtless thought that he was a very inoffensive little shopkeeper, dexterous at ~~parcelling~~ <sup>arranging</sup> ~~up~~ <sup>in</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~hand~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~she~~ <sup>she</sup> ~~had~~ sheets of paper, and very civil in his manners. There was really nothing to indicate in the least that he was one of the most offensive creatures alive! On the contrary, Elsie found him that morning extremely polite, and very helpful in suggesting the precise quality of paints she should select. She purchased, besides, some sheets of drawing-paper, some sticks of charcoal and a small canvas. As he gave back the change, Nicolay looked at her rather closely, rather admiringly; saw, too, with a certain satisfaction that she was apparently in the same social position as he was, and when she took up her parcel and walked across the Strand, which at the particular moment was free from traffic except for a fruit-barrow, he followed her with his eyes till she disappeared into the doorway opposite.

'Demned fine girl!' muttered Nicolay.

During the afternoon he came to his shop door now and again, and looked up at all the windows of the tene-

ment to see if perhaps she might be looking down. But he saw nothing of her. Next day, however, she came back for a finer brush. Nicolay took the opportunity of asking her how the sketch or painting, or whatever it was, was getting on. He, too, he said, used to draw and paint, but doubtless she was far more skilful at it than he.

Elsie, a little surprised, looked at the stranger, thanked him, and said she was getting on very well. He then said that was nice, and asked her how she liked living in the Strand, and if it wasn't too noisy—omnibuses thumping along all day, and all night, too, almost, and allowing a sleeper precious little sleep. Or perhaps she made sketches of the Strand and its picturesque con-  
she thought of doing that  
very thing, strange to say, and asked in return if he would 'consider' her little paintings, and perhaps be willing to sell them on commission.

Of course he would! 'Of course—of course,' he repeated quite genuinely, and fully interested in Elsie, who seemed the most adorable dark-eyed girl who had ever put foot in the Strand. Their eyes met just at that moment, and Elsie's had a very pleasant smile in them indeed, for she was thinking of how happy the news would make her lonely papa. Nicolay, age about thirty-five or thirty-six, she thought, with his rather dull eyes, straw-coloured moustache and straw-coloured eyebrows, was the first human being who had spoken a kind word to her since she had been in London. He said that he, too, was not London-born, and that he was horribly lonely when he first came.

She felt very grateful, and was impatient to hurry across to tell Horneck of the unexpected good-fortune.

Wouldn't she hand her first earnings right over, every shilling of them, to him ! Before she went, however, Nicolay, after recommending her to start work at once, and bring over her painting as soon as it was finished, said :

'By the way, yesterday I saw you go over to the tenement opposite. Do you happen to know if the Dr. Horneck over there is a good doctor ?'

'Why, he's my father !' exclaimed Elsie. 'Yes, indeed he's a good doctor. He's one of the cleverest men in London, if you will excuse *me* saying so !'

'Certainly, certainly,' said Nicolay, smiling on her; 'I've no doubt of it. I would like to consult him, I've got such a bad cold settled in my lungs here. When are his hours ?'

'Oh, he'll be glad to see you at any time,' said Elsie.

'Well, then, I shall come over this afternoon.'

'Or *he* might come to you ?'

'Not at all—not at all, thank you. I'll come over shortly,' said Nicolay.

Elsie, quite delighted, tripped across and ran upstairs out of breath to tell her father that at last he was going to have a patient. And when she added that Nicolay was actually going to buy her pictures and sketches, Horneck, with a smile breaking over his great dark face, stroked her hair, and muttered that perhaps they would both weather the storm yet. He waited all the afternoon for Nicolay, who came about five o'clock. Horneck, who with his height of six feet and over seemed almost too big for his room, asked the little man to sit down and explain his case. Nicolay, in fact, was genuinely ill, as Horneck soon discovered by his cough and the rate of his pulse ; but when he ordered him to go home

to bed and stay there, Nicolay said he could not afford to leave his shop.

'We shall keep an eye on it for you,' said Horneck, 'and your assistant will manage very well.'

Nicolay then assented, and said Horneck was very kind.

'Not at all,' said the doctor; 'I hear *you* have been kind enough, sir, to ask my daughter to paint and draw. I think you will be pleased; she has a neat hand at that sort of thing. However, get home—get home at once. You are shivering, are you not? Take a cab.'

Nicolay said his address was in Craven Street, quite close, so that he could easily walk there.

This, then, was the trivial beginning of Elsie's tragedy. Nicolay soon transformed himself into a friend and a lover. To begin with, Horneck made him well in a few days, and he was at his shop again within a week. One morning Elsie went over to show him, as promised, a vivid little sketch of the Strand, and of course congratulated him on his recovery. He praised her work very warmly indeed, and bought it for a guinea. But he was annoyed when she seemed anxious to hurry away as soon as he had paid her the money. 'D—— it all, what's the good of that!' he muttered, almost audibly. But Elsie was so pleased, so grateful, that the tears of joy were almost at her eyes. Nicolay, whose passion for her had now greatly increased, hinted that he would like to go over to see the doctor just in a friendly way. Elsie readily invited him. She thought he might serve to relieve the monotony of an hour or two for her father, and she told Nicolay that the doctor would be quite charmed. But Horneck was not at all charmed. Horneck, in fact, was quite sick at the thought of the

shopman's intrusion. Poor as he was, he had not lost a certain pride ; on the contrary, it rather increased with his poverty. Elsie, of course, had known poverty almost from her childhood, and looked at things differently. It vexed Horneck to see that she was almost content with her lot. It was galling to think that he and his poor Elsie were reduced to such straits that they had to court the company of a man as inferior to them as Nicolay.

' You're not angry, father, that he is coming ? ' asked Elsie, noticing his displeasure.

' Oh, well, not exactly. We owe a good deal to him, I suppose,' said Horneck ; ' but I wouldn't expect him to be a very companionable person. He is hardly in ~~our~~ position.'

Elsie looked at him wonderingly. *Our position !*

' I wish to say nothing against him,' continued Horneck. ' He may be a very excellent man, but, after all, after all, Elsie, it is difficult to make permanent friendship with people beneath you in culture, you know. Remember this another time.'

Nicolay came and passed an evening with them, and although Horneck was horribly bored, he submitted as cheerfully as he could. Now and again, however, he felt inclined to burst out laughing at the man's pretensions. But, after all, he was promising commissions for Elsie, and talking admiringly of her work. If she worked steadily for him, she might make on an average three or four pounds a month.

After Nicolay had left, Elsie saw that her father was still displeased, and although she said nothing, she thought it was very ungrateful of him. But perhaps Horneck had begun to consider the man's motives. At

any rate, he began to dislike Elsie's visits to the shop opposite, even although she came back with a guinea or two after having sold her sketches. He used to stand at his window to watch her cross over and enter the shop. And when, as often happened, she remained more than half an hour, he became thoroughly angry. He told her to get her business over always as quickly as possible. There was an undoubted change approaching. She now began to sit very often at the window, gazing opposite at the gold letters, 'Joseph Nicolay.' She used to sit even long into the twilight, when the shop's window was already lit. When Horneck asked her to pull down the blind and light the gas and come to the fire, she said it was too early.

'Early,' growled Horneck, 'and every house opposite is lit, and all the cabs and omnibuses have their lamps lit! It is past six o'clock.'

'Yes, father; but didn't you say we were to save the gas?' she asked gently.

In short, when Nicolay began to come across regularly after his shop was closed for the night, Horneck's alarm increased. And when, one day, Elsie told him that Mr. Nicolay had offered to take her to the theatre, and that she wished permission to accept his invitation, Horneck rushed weeping out of the room. Elsie gave up the theatre that night, but she asked her father what was wrong.

'It's this Elsie dear,' he said quickly, as if eager to say it: 'I see what's going on. I see, and I am afraid! I see that he . . . that man . . . Elsie dear, is it possible that I'm going to lose you?'

His voice rose to a shriek, and he was in the greatest excitement she had ever seen.

'No, father, no, never!' cried Elsie, going up to him and seizing his hand. 'Do you mean to say it would make any difference? You will live with us.'

'Ah, my God, has it gone as far as this!' exclaimed Horneck.

'He had never seemed to her so absolutely helpless, and he was covering his face with his hands.

'My dear child,' he said, in a breaking voice, 'don't think for a moment that I am afraid to lose you because you are now winning bread for me. Not for a moment, Elsie! I am thinking about your own happiness. Oh, this is impossible! Elsie, are you dreaming? ~~I~~ is utterly beneath you!'

'Beneath me, father! You seem to look upon me as if I were a duke's daughter.'

'You are a baronet's grand-daughter, Elsie.'

'What has that done for us? Mr. Nicolay is the only one who has ever done us a kind action,' she answered.

'My dear girl, it is only our little misfortune which has thrown us into a position where we need the help of such as he.'

'What can anyone say against Mr. Nicolay?' she demanded. 'Think of his kindness to us during these weeks. He paid me for these pictures more than twice their value long before we ever expected to become friends.'

The fact was, however, that the dexterous Nicolay had been secretly hoping that Elsie would retain at least one-half of these payments to give it back to him once they were married. And one day he even cautiously and jocularly questioned her as to what she did with the money he gave her, whether, for instance,

she spent it on bonbons or perfume or other exquisite trifles dear to women. But in case his motive might become too visible, he hastily passed to other things.

What Horneck feared, however, was precisely the thing that was happening. That is to say, poor Elsie was considering as much the value of her marriage to her father as to herself. His money was running short, his prospects were as black as they could be; but if she could provide him with a home, he would be safe in his old age. Moreover, Nicolay had consented. Horneck, however, saw it all, and warned and urged her to make no such foolish sacrifice. Nay, he said straight out that he disliked Nicolay. Then followed, of course, the usual ~~unconscionable~~ estrangement. But Horneck clung to her as long and as passionately as he could.

'Am I to understand,' she asked, 'that you forbid him to come here, father?'

'No, darling, no, no, not exactly *that*,' said Horneck, unwilling to hurt her.

Indeed, throughout this strange duel of their affections Horneck's tenderness rather increased than diminished. He was lonely and bewildered, and his anxiety was roused not merely by his perception of Nicolay's essential unfitness, but also by his own eager jealousy and desire still to possess his child. By this time, of course, Nicolay had got to know their poverty, and the reader may think that, after all, there must have been something good in the man which made him cling to Elsie. I tell you, there could be nothing good in a man whose diabolism broke out on her afterwards in such a way. Wait till you hear. Dismiss any such thought of generosity from your mind, therefore, and

think of him only as a soft-stepping, sinister little man, a mere passion on legs. It was her undoubted beauty, and nothing more, which was drawing him on. On the other hand, Horneck's remonstrances to Elsie were vain, and when he saw that she was using her artistic powers in drawing portraits of Nicolay for her own private admiration—portraits so successful as to indicate a personal pleasure in their production—Horneck, like the wise man he was, decided not to estrange his Elsie by further opposition, but to give his reluctant and pained consent.

Yes, they were married. Horneck lived through the insupportable day doing his best to keep his temper. It was because he loved Elsie too completely that he was unable to quarrel with her, and for her sake went through the wretched ceremony of giving her away. The suddenness of the whole thing filled him with distrust and amazement, and he felt that his fortunes had now reached their lowest ebb. He had taken a personal dislike to Nicolay, and nothing could cure him of it. However, when Elsie told him that she would never leave him, that there was not even to be a honeymoon, so that she would not be separated from him for a single day, he became more pleased, and tried to resign himself with less misgiving. But he refused to live with them, and said he could manage very well alone. Nicolay, quite glad therefore, took Elsie to Craven Street, while Horneck sat dreaming by his fireside, and had to content himself with seeing her at most once a day. She was thus able to look after his wants only very irregularly and imperfectly. Nicolay, moreover, began to grumble when she stayed away too long. He meant to absorb her completely, and would not

brook even a paternal rival. Whenever Elsie proposed that they should spend the evening with her father, Nicolay objected, and kept her beside himself. In short, he was gradually isolating her, and days would pass without Horneck having a single glimpse of her. He used to watch at his window to see if she frequented the shop, and once when he saw her coming, but he signed to her to come up. But she signed back to indicate that Nicolay would be unwilling, and so she had to content herself with kissing her hand to him before she walked away. Horneck, in a kind of dull amazement, sat in his chair thinking over the meaning of it for hours. But his full anger was not really roused until he heard that ~~Nicolay~~ had compelled her to serve in the shop with him. Not many days after their wedding he asked her one morning if she was not ready to go with him. She asked where he was going.

'Why, to the shop, of course. Where would I be going? I wish you to come and tidy up things a bit, and, for that matter, help in the selling.'

She was a little surprised, but she put on her bonnet and accompanied him. A precedent had thus been made, and it became a regular affair. She remained in the shop from eight till eight, and often Nicolay might be absent half the day. He sometimes became very irritated when she mistook the price of things and under-sold them. She said she was new to the business, but would learn quickly.

When Horneck knew what was happening, however, he determined to put a stop to it. He went over to Nicolay, and had a violent scene with him. What! would his daughter serve in a shop! At the very moment Elsie was parcelling a paint-box, and Horneck

ordered her to come away. Nicolay, however, decided to endure no such interference, and he told his father-in-law to mind his own business. But Horneck began to use violent words, till Elsie implored him to stop. Indeed, Horneck's violence became so great that Nicolay ordered him out of the shop, and dared him to come back. The huge man, rather for Elsie's sake than at the bidding of his son-in-law, went away in a state of consternation.

The result of the quarrel was that Nicolay forbade Elsie to enter her father's lodgings, and it was now only by stealth she could see him at all. He had to be content with waving his hand to her once or twice a day as she arrived at the shop or left it.

One day while Nicolay had gone into the City on business, Elsie stole across to see her father. It was the first time she had seen him since he had been ordered out of the shop in her presence. She found him eating a frugal lunch, and there was a German book lying open on the table. Horneck had a sallow skin, but it seemed to Elsie that he had become much paler. She was shocked, besides, at his frugal meal, which consisted of two slices of bread and a piece of cheese. He was so absorbed in his book that he did not hear her enter, and it was not till her hand was on his shoulder that he started up.

'Ah, my dear child,' he said, 'I have very little to offer you.'

'I wish nothing, father,' she replied — 'absolutely nothing. How are you?'

'I am very well, Elsie. And how are you?'

She sat down opposite him, and said with a sigh that she was all right.

'How is business doing?' asked Horneck.

'Not very well,' she said. 'In fact, father, I've come to tell you something that will surprise you.'

'What?' asked Horneck quickly, and putting down the piece of bread he was lifting to his mouth.

'Joseph said last night that he was going to give up business. It is not paying, he says, and he proposes that we should go to Australia. He thinks he would get on well there, either in gold-mining or in a cattle-station. He has friends out there. But if *we* go, *you* must come with us, father! That's what I've come about.'

'Did he send you?' inquired Horneck.

She admitted no.

'Elsie, Elsie, then,' he said, 'how is it possible? Even if I had the money, you know that your husband would alter his plans immediately if he heard I were coming.'

'Oh, then *I* shall not go!' exclaimed Elsie. It was on her lips to cry; 'Father, won't you take me back?' But she resisted the temptation, and only repeated that he must come.

The news was a great shock to Horneck, and he could not fail to see that it had been also a great shock to Elsie herself. When she asked his advice, he told her, of course, that she should follow her husband. The look of fear which crossed her face was remembered by Horneck very long after, but even at the moment he detected that Elsie was unhappy.

'Father, won't you come?' she implored. 'He talks about starting in a month.'

'My dear child,' said Horneck, with his eyes full of tears, 'has he not forbidden you to see me at all? If

he knew you were here just now, wouldn't he be displeased? Well, then, Elsie, I refuse to be the cause of strife between you.'

She gave a hopeless smile in her effort to make things appear all right.

'What is it, dear?—what is it?' asked Horneck, taking her hand. 'Is everything all right? Dear me, your pulse is extraordinarily quick!'

'Oh, it's nothing, father!' she said. 'It's leaving you behind that makes me so anxious.'

'This will be a terrible grief to me, Elsie,' he said—'a terrible grief. Australia is so far away! Before your marriage we were never a day absent from each other.' It is strange ~~that~~, this idea has seized him so suddenly. But you could never expect him to leave you behind, darling. He loves you so much, and you love him so much!'

He did not know that his words burned into her like hot two-edged irony. She even wished that his suspicions of her husband were stronger than they were—as strong as her own! But the natural desire to cover up her blunder and her suffering made her add nothing to his uneasiness. For he thought she was miserable only because she was leaving him behind, and she let him think it. When Nicolay had first announced his project to her, she was filled with surprise. She urged him rather to struggle on in the shop, than to court disaster in a new land. She promised to help him uncomplainingly. He was not to suppose, she said, that her father's objections to shopkeeping were shared by herself. But he said he had grown tired of the Strånd. He was full of the vague dreams which fill the brains of emigrants. Anywhere, anywhere, except *here!* they

think. As if the monotonies of pleasure and pain are not the same under every sky. But he said no, they would come home rich. He would renounce selling the indecent prints which had shocked her. And in a moment of spurious tenderness he added that he would rather be a cowboy and cattle-driver than shock her. She said she would go if her father would ; but Nicolay knew that Horneck would never go, and was satisfied. And when Elsie came to know it, too, she resigned herself to her fate, only with a kind of terror.

It was clearly impossible for Horneck to accompany her, but as the day of departure approached he became very excited. He had not seen Nicolay since their quarrel. But he determined to see as much as possible of Elsie during the few remaining hours. The shop opposite was now closed, because Nicolay had succeeded in selling off his stock at a profit. They were packing up. In a few days she would be lost to Horneck. He tried to subdue his blazing jealousy, but once he rushed down to Craven Street, determined to see her at all costs. Luckily, Nicolay was out. When Horneck asked Elsie if he would be allowed to see her off she threw her arms round his neck, and protested that of course he would. So that when the day came Horneck went down to Tilbury, whence the ship sailed. Nicolay shook hands impatiently without glancing at Horneck, and seemed anxious to get on board at once.

The reader will remember that Nicolay was distantly related by marriage to Rewbell. Nicolay's brother had married Rewbell's sister. At this time Rewbell was, of course, at North Bayton, and saw very little of the Nicolays. The old lord was then living, and he gave Rewbell leave that day to come up to see his friends

off, and so it was on this occasion that Horneck had first been introduced to him. Neither of them knew at that moment that they would see so much of each other later on, when Nicolay had married Millicent and had settled down at Eight Bells, with Horneck for ever at his side. But on being introduced Rewbell was struck by Horneck's gigantic figure, and by his deeply-marked, powerful, rather scornful face. The next time he saw it was at Lord Mompesson's death-bed, as the reader remembers.

Horneck, however, was too occupied at that moment with his own grief at losing Elsie to pay much attention to the stealthy presence of Edwin Rewbell. They were all standing on the dock quay ready to say good-bye. Elsie, almost fainting, and muttering something about 'writing every mail,' felt herself pulled out of her father's arms across the gangway. Horneck, murmuring her name, waited till the steamer and the fluttering handkerchief were out of sight, and went back to London with his heart vacant.

Horneck found enough to do, however, from the day he saw Nicolay go away with Elsie till the day he saw him return without her. He had better fortune than he expected. For his sister, Mrs. Paston, died, and in her will had appointed him guardian of her blind daughter Harriet. This happened within a fortnight of Elsie's departure, so that Horneck's attention was turned from his own loneliness to the helplessness and loneliness of his niece.

Mrs. Paston had survived her husband, who had been an artillery officer, and had brought up Harriet at Surbiton. She could think of no better guardian for her than Horneck, and the fact that he was not merely

Harriet's uncle, but a doctor as well, seemed to indicate that no better choice could be made. Long ago she had mentioned her wish to Horneck, and he had given a verbal promise about it. He was not surprised, therefore, when he heard that, according to the will, he was to receive two hundred pounds a year for life if he accepted the charge. Harriet would have about four hundred to live on, which he was to administer for her.

Possessing full confidence in her brother, Mrs. Paston died in peace. At her death-bed he had renewed his promises. A few days after the funeral he and Harriet left Surbiton for the lodgings in the Strand. Harriet and her maid were given Elsie's room. Horneck decided, however, that sooner or later he would remove his blind charge to the country, where she could go out with less danger than in the London streets. Certainly it seemed to matter little to the blind girl whether her new home were well or ill furnished. Yet she was not altogether unconscious of outward forms of luxury, and according to her mother's wishes she was to be provided with everything she required.

Horneck felt very grateful to his sister, and blessed her memory. The arrangement had relieved him at a very critical time, and he hastened to inform Elsie, whose first address was at Brisbane, that she need have now no fear about her father. Henceforth he was passing rich, since two hundred a year would supply all his wants. Moreover, Harriet, blind though she was, in some sense filled Elsie's place. He had loved and pitied Harriet from her childhood, and he remembered being summoned more than eighteen years ago by her mother, who was in great distress about the child's blindness. At

that time he examined her eyes and pronounced them to be almost hopelessly blind. Since then he had seen very little of her, because Mrs. Paston had remained a long time abroad, and had taken Harriet with her. Horneck was now surprised to find her a tall, beautiful girl with dark eyelashes, very straight features, and dark hair. But her hair was not as dark as Elsie's; there was a faint auburn tinge in it.

The first thing he looked at when he got home among his instruments was the iris of her eye, which was intact, and of a violet hue. The pupil also was the normal size, and a stranger would at first never have supposed Harriet to be blind. Really, she was not completely blind; the optic nerves had strengthened somewhat with her growth. Of course she could not distinguish the details of any object; she could not, for instance, analyze visually the contents of a mosaic, or even distinguish one human face from another. But her eyes had not the dull, lifeless stare of confirmed blindness. No. She could see objects in dim outline at a certain distance. Thus, she would not answer to the definition of blindness given by German oculists like Schmidt Rimpler, who says that a person must be considered absolutely blind who cannot move a distance of one third of a metre without using his hands to guide him.

This mathematical test of blindness did not apply to Harriet. She could grope her way to where a fire was shining, for instance, and moved about a room with no great difficulty. She rather came under that class of blind persons mentioned by Von Zehender, persons who can distinguish light from darkness, and can even see objects at a certain distance as masses more or less

distinct. A kind of mist seemed to shroud her vision, but it was a mist lit dimly, perhaps, but still lit by a glow as of embers. If the sun happened to be shining on a dazzling lawn, she became conscious of a certain effulgence. Ordinarily, however, the outside world appeared to her to exist in a twilight and strange glow. Indeed, it was to this fact, as Horneck found out later, and explained to the young Lord Mompesson, that her impassioned imagination was due. It was because she had inklings and promises of light that her desire for a vision of beauty which never came was so intense. She had only enough of the powers of vision to wish for more, and make her feel the exasperation of blindness.

Unwilling and imperfect instruments as were her eyes, yet they had an expression not of blankness, but of vivid dream, as if they were supplying her with an inner world of vision as rich as the outer. Technically her disease was called partial atrophy of the optic nerve, that mysterious minister of half the delights of life. The retina was intact, like the iris, and even the slim muscles of the globe were perfect, so that she could move her eyes as she pleased. But what failed her was the power of focussing the rays of light, so that her impressions of objects were blurred and dim. Horneck hoped to be able to save as much money as would take her to Magnus of Breslau, who might yet do something for her. But from his own examination he concluded that she would never see clearly. He questioned her on her ideas of colour, but he found that they were strangely confused. When he took one of the paint-brushes Elsie had left behind, and covered a piece of card-board with a splash of violet, and held

it up at a distance for Harriet to judge the colour, she said she only saw a black spot. When he did the same with vermillion and purple, she could not distinguish the difference between them.

He told her not to dishearten herself. But the promise of sight had been held out to her too often already. As a child she had been instructed in the miracles of Jesus, and had been told that if only she believed with a faith as strong as the faith of blind Bartimæus, like him she would be healed. She used to pray earnestly, therefore, night after night. But five whole years of these devout childish prayers had come to nothing, and one day she startled her mother by saying that she wished to hear no more of the Bible. Her teachers, indeed, found the most extraordinary difficulty in their attempt to instruct her in religion. She would have none of it. She remained a dark enigma to them. She said she was busy thinking about destiny on her own account. Either, she said, Providence had been malicious or as blind as herself.

She had not stayed long with Horneck, indeed, till he saw that hers was not the usual passive nature of the blind. On the contrary, she bore her misfortune with great impatience. She had more energy than most blind people have. Blindness seems to reduce the force of a personality and make it mute and pathetically impassive. But Harriet was evidently disturbed by the strength of her will. And a blind will is the most terrible thing in the world.

'Uncle,' she once said, as she groped her way across the room towards him, 'do *you* believe in those miracles by which we are told blind people received their sight?'

'Well, Harriet,' said Horneck, 'it is true that our modern miracles are all done by surgeons' knives.'

'I don't believe one of them,' she said. 'This blindness of mine is an outrage! What's the good of me living?'

Horneck tried to calm her. She must live, he said, because she was so beautiful.

'Beautiful!' she replied. 'Now, what does that mean?'

'We who see it can't tell, either,' said Horneck.

'Ah, but *I* would know it if I could only see it. How stupid you people must be!'

'No, Harriet,' Horneck answered, 'it's not so easy as you think. Beauty is as much an enigma as anything else.'

'What a wonderful thing a mirror must be!' exclaimed Harriet. 'I've heard about them, and I've tried to look into them time after time. But I never could see myself. I do wish I could. Uncle, am *I* beautiful? Am I so beautiful that I would wish to kiss myself if I ever saw myself? I believe I do love myself in an extraordinary way, because I've never known any other one. Isn't it beauty that all the world runs after?'

Her naive vanity was not vanity. Vanity needs eyes. Vanity inhabits a mirror, but in the dark mirror of her soul she saw only symbols and dreams. It was clear that the ordinary education of the blind had not exhausted all the faculties of this child. It was nothing to her that she could knit and sew and fashion wicker-work, or even play music and sing. No. She wished to act. She had within her some dim desire of pomp, the sense of pageantry and spectacle, the lust of the eye and the pride of life.

'The lust of the eye must be the most wonderful thing in the world, uncle,' she once said to Horneck.

She had been told that the world outside her was gorgeous. She knew gorgeousness only in dreams. She had heard of firmaments and stars and human beauty. How many times had she been vexed by descriptions of trailing roses! She had to remain the thrall of darkness. A blind impassioned being, thought Horneck, offered the most tragic possibilities, and he began to think that, after all, his guardianship was going to be no sinecure. Some inward force, he suspected it was Love, seemed to be urging Harriet, and every word she uttered proved that she dwelt in a world of turmoil and thought, of strange joys and terrors different from his own. He felt the need of Elsie, who would have been a companion for her. If the foolish Elsie had only waited, Fortune would have been ready with something better for her than ever her marriage could be! Obviously, a woman was the proper companion for Harriet. She had her maid, of course, but the confidences of the blind—and Horneck noticed that Harriet was eager to give confidences—deserve to be entrusted only to judicious confessors. Had Harriet been totally blind, perhaps she would have been more patient with her destiny. For she would have been completely shut out from the world, and would have had no visual consciousness whatever of its apparent beauty." As it was, however, she *almost saw*, and the world seemed to call to her through the haze. Yet, let her strain her eyes ever so much, it would be for ever covered, by a glimmering mist. A little more power in her optic nerve, and then the full blaze of it would have burst upon her.

"Uncle," she said, "am I never, never to *see*?"

"Yes, Harriet, we shall hope so," said Horneck, after

He had examined her eyes again very closely through a powerful optical instrument.

'Well then, *do* something; make it really yes this time! They have been telling me from the beginning that I was to see some day. I am always just on the point of it, they say. Oh, it is cruel! My mother is dead; I knew that only by touching her cold body and because she didn't answer when I spoke. But, any way, she is happier than I am.'

'You do distinguish between light and darkness?' he asked.

'Yes, yes,' she said. 'When they took me into the room where she was dying, everything was black, black. I had just come in from the lawn, where there are hyacinths and roses. I've got to know them by their different smell now. What wonderful things they must be! Well, I was taken in and pushed towards her, and her last words were that you would give me my sight and take care of me. I'm in London, am I not?'

'Yes; this is the Strand roaring past our window,' said Horneck.

She went to the window.

'I love the sound of horses' hoofs,' she said. 'I wish I could see them running. How fast they must go!'

When Horneck asked her what she saw, she said she saw only a succession of dark things moving endlessly, as if toiling, toiling forever in a continuous line.

'Where's my cousin Elsie?' she asked.

'She is married, Harriet.'

'Oh, mother didn't know it, then. She said Elsie was so handsome, and that she would be such a friend to me. I thought Elsie and I would sleep together. She is married. What's her husband like? How

strange it must be to have a husband! Uncle, is it true that love needs vision? Is it only those with eyes who can love each other? It isn't! It isn't!

'Well, we must admit,' said Horneck, 'that the normal sense of beauty does rest in vision. But beauty is deeper than vision. It must be felt, Harriet.'

'Yes, yes, that's it. I *feel* it! Ah, but when I feel it, I feel also as if I wish to seize and cling to something, to grasp it, don't you know. Isn't beauty a thing to handle? Uncle, I am afraid I am wearying you. Ah, I wish to learn so much. I felt that the people I was brought up with were all dull. I knew by their voices. And yet they filled me with the most exciting thoughts about the world outside, and I can't keep quiet. They told me that the heavens are ablaze all night as with sapphires. Of course, I don't know what sapphires are like, but they must be wonderful things if the description of them is true. And they described the colour of summer to me, the colour of grapes, and the gold light of the sun. How thankful you people with eyes ought to be!'

Horneck allowed her talk thus for hours. He was thoroughly interested in her. Evidently her senses were all the keener just because one of them had been so mutilated. But what might not happen to her? He thought it would be wise to remove her to the country. London seemed to excite her too much. She clamoured to get out to feel the life of the great city throbbing in the air about her. She seemed not to fear the streets. She asked him, in fact, to remain with her in London. And, indeed, Horneck did not stir for a long time. But he decided that whenever an opportunity occurred he would take her to the country, where she might have

an outdoor life with ~~as~~ little danger as possible. As the reader knows, the opportunity did occur. Indeed, Nicolay would sooner or later be on his homeward voyage without Elsie, and Horneck's horror at Elsie's loss, which acted on him like a hallucination, urged him never more to allow Nicolay out of his sight. So that if the reader remains patient until we have described Nicolay's crime and return, we shall soon be back to Eight Bells, where all these tragedies met together and worked themselves out.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE EVERLASTING BRUTE

HORNECK had had various letters from Elsie in which she said that she and her husband were leading a rather nomadic life. Evidently she was trying to put it humorously when she wrote that it looked as if she had gone to Australia in order to assume the life of a gipsy. Nicolay, in fact, was making no progress, in spite of all his wanderings. To be one day here and another there was hardly the policy of a successful squatter. An irregular instinct seemed to drive the man from one place to another, so that the money he had saved was easily spent.

They had now moved to the far north of Queensland, where there are more blacks than in any other part of Australia, except, perhaps, in the unexplored central tracts. Elsie thought he was making for the extensive sugar plantations which lie up north, but the truth was, Nicolay hardly knew his own mind. He soon gave up the post he had secured in a gold-field in the south, but he still hoped to come across gold on his own account, as many of the earlier settlers had done by digging in the beds of unknown streams or in sandy creeks. So

he carried with him picks and shovels and tin basins in which to wash the mud which might contain the precious deposit. Besides he had purchased two horses, one for Elsie and one for himself, and he had provided himself with a native boy as guide, who was mounted as well. At first it really looked as if the man had suddenly turned romantic. He had even bought a pair of pistols, which is always a sure sign. And as the night deepened on a lonely upland or a dark tract of scrub, his sense of romantic tragedy deepened likewise. Nay, the fighting man actually shot a wild bullock, which, as it moved cautiously amid the darkness and the scrub, and had remained irresponsive to his challenge of 'Who goes?' he mistook for a human enemy. On the whole, he felt much nearer the sublime here than he had ever done in the squalid Strand. He did not seem to think, however, that this rough bushranging life was unsuitable to Elsie. She had to bear her share of heavy baggage. For since they remained hardly three weeks in one place, but moved irresolutely from one station to another, they were compelled to carry provisions. They had left Chaster Towers long ago, and were now making their way westward towards the Albert River. The tropical climate, with its moist heat, was having injurious effects on Elsie. Fever and ague alternated, and sometimes, although she was suffering from both, she was compelled to jolt over rough roads or ride through interminable glens. She wondered what it all meant. It was specially trying when they were forced to pass through the dense scrub and cut their way mile by mile. The black boy was an excellent guide, however, and found his way by following the tracks of herds and

horses, miles beyond the waggoners' road. For he knew that these tracks led to the open pasture-lands loved by wild beeves. Many a time Elsie and Nicolay depended for their mid-day meal on the boy's prowess as a hunter. Often he would run down a young kangaroo, and bring it over his shoulder and lay it at Elsie's feet, mumbling, 'Yowwy budgeree!' (Yes, very good!) Once, when no kangaroo was visible, he tracked a snake to where it slept cunningly coiled up, promptly seized it by the back of the neck, crushed its head with a stone, and then offered it to his master and mistress for dinner, with the repeated assurance, 'Yowwy budgeree!' But although it would have done them no harm, they turned ill at the thought of such a dinner. Luckily, they were nearing a cattle-station that night, where they put up at a little Bush inn.

The region through which they were passing consisted of magnificent pasture-land, blotted out now and again by scrub and miniature forests. Many a night Elsie slept in the open air, except when the black boy succeeded in constructing hastily a mia-mia, or hut of bark and logs open at one side. She used to hear the howls of the dingoes, or wild-dogs of Australia, in their midnight hunt of opossums or kangaroos. Soon she became familiar with the cries of the various animals which crossed their path, such as wombats and bandicoots. The sounds of strange birds like the laughing-jackass, the bower-bird, the ostrich, the white cockatoos, and the flying-foxes made her conscious that she had left Old England very far behind. Sometimes they would lose their way in a forest, and not find it till the boy had climbed twenty trees and more to look for the sun. The

crowded vegetation, these vast primeval growths, thicket upon thicket, impeded their way.

It was a good thing that Elsie had learned hunting long ago in Yorkshire, and had it not been for her distrust of her husband she might actually have enjoyed this strange new life. The trees alone were worth coming out from England to see. The golden wattle, the great timber trees like the red gum, the acacia, the salt bush, the coco-palm, the wild grape, and the wonderful scented mimosa, together with the strange intermixture of mallee and mulga scrub, made up a new, amazing world for her.

But she could not understand Nicolay's intentions. He had not money enough to afford such a journey merely for pleasure; and yet she remembered that at Craven Street he used to read books of travel with a delight which showed that voyages and adventures were the only sort of idealism the man knew. She asked him where they were going. She was beginning to feel positively ill with the exposure. He assured her he was making his way to a cattle-station with letters of introduction, and they would settle down there for some time. He told her to trust the native boy, who knew the way. But sometimes, when she lay down at night, after the hobbles had been put on the horses to prevent them straying, and heard the awakening night-life of the forest all round her, and felt the huge spiders weaving great coils over her head, she shuddered and wept secretly, whispering her father's name, expecting never to see him or daylight again.

The fact was that, although Nicolay intended to stop at the cattle-station to which they were approaching, he

really meant to push his way into the unexplored parts of Central or Southern Australia, where, as the native boy, who had a sprinkling of English, told him, there was gold.

'That good place, massa,' he used to say, pointing westwards, 'me come from, big fellow gold lives. Me a kipper and knows. Baal white man there' (that is, no white man there).

Nicolay, in short, had become quite enthusiastic, and had even provided himself with a compass, a chronometer, and a map. No one who had seen the dexterous man parcelling paint tubes in the Strand would have expected him to take so readily to the Bush. The man actually appeared to have pluck<sup>o</sup> of a sort. The ferocity of his nature began to develop ; his selfishness, for instance, developed by leaps and bounds. He insisted on dragging Elsie willy-nilly at least as far as the cattle-station. But he felt that she was becoming daily a greater burden to him ; a man in the Bush, he told her, does not require a wife, and there was a probability that after he arrived at the cattle-station he might leave her there and go with the native boy on an excursion further up. She heard all these things with calmness. She certainly hoped he would go on an excursion with the native boy, for then she might have a chance of escaping.

At last they arrived at Norak, or Hirton's Run, as the place was called after Hirton, its owner. His land was mostly open, and no finer pasture could be found in Australia. Hirton, who was a thickset, rough-looking man and a typical squatter, had been squatting for the last ten years. He sent down south the best beef and

mutton to be seen in Brisbane Market. He was a man of considerable wealth, who was content to keep adding to it without further ambitions. He preferred a rough life, and avoided cities. There was not even a village near, and the next cattle-station was forty miles away, while the nearest railway was a day's journey.

Hirton's Run consisted of the farm buildings and shed, the huts for the stockmen, and at a distance of about a hundred yards Timbrow's Inn, where the cattle-drivers met to consume their wages. Travellers further westward used to make Timbrow's Inn, a halting-place between Norak and the next station, so that it became a rendezvous for all sorts and conditions. And it was here that Nicolay and Elsie first put up.

Nicolay lost no time, however, in going over to Hirton's, and presenting the letter of introduction which a friend at Brisbane had given him. Hirton looked at him shrewdly, and asked what he was fit for. Had he come alone? How long did he mean to stay? Did he know anything about cattle?

Nicolay said he knew very little about cattle, but was quite ready to learn. He had had enough of civilization, and was now anxious for an open-air life. Mr. Hirton was not to suppose that he was physically weak, although he was physically small.

'Can you gather cleanskins?' asked Hirton.

Nicolay admitted that he didn't happen to know what 'cleanskins' were.

'Cleanskins,' said Hirton, 'are the wild cattle which were originally tame, but have been allowed to stray and multiply among the scrub, and are anybody's

property now. We catch and brand them with our own name. It takes some doing, I tell you. You've sometimes to be out all night with your horses, and catch them at daybreak if you can. We sometimes go in for a wild horse or two besides, and *that* takes doing, you bet. D'you think you're up to it?

Nicolay could only repeat that he would be very willing indeed to make himself useful. He might stay at the game an indefinite time if it promised a good berth.

'Well, then, it so happens,' continued Hirton, 'that we are short of hands just at present. You can do some branding for us. They're busy at it in that shed, you see. I may give you a better job up-country later.'

The bullocks were being lassoed and branded in the enclosure, and the din was frightful. But Hirton whistled loudly, and a slimly-built fellow came across from the other side of the yard. This was Wharton, whose acquaintance Nicolay thus made for the first time. Wharton was Hirton's chief stockman, and he used to be sent on the most difficult adventures in gathering in wild herds. He could do any amount of dodging on horseback, and even rivalled the Australian boys at it. He had brought in more 'cleanskins than any other man. The country round about reminded him of his native Sussex, in which the reader first made his acquaintance. As soon as Nicolay had been introduced to him, and they had shaken hands, Wharton asked him if he had come to take his place. For Wharton was soon going home to Sussex, and had already given notice. Nicolay shook his head, and said

He didn't know enough about the business, and that it seemed jolly rough.

'Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Nicolay,' said Wharton, as he proceeded to show him round the station and gave him a tip or two. He took him to the branding-pen, where the wild cattle were struggling with their captors, who were busy stamping a large H with hot irons on the beasts' backs.

'Jolly rough work,' repeated Nicolay as he watched a man running a rope round a brute's legs, and then bringing it to the ground.

'It is,' replied Wharton, 'but you get used to it. The best fun is catching them. Have you a horse?'

'Yes,' said Nicolay; 'but I don't suppose he's up to that trick.'

'Staying at Timbrow's, I suppose?'

Nicolay said yes, and then invited him to go over for a drink. Nicolay was to begin work on Monday. It was now Saturday, past twelve o'clock, and the inn was beginning to fill with a boisterous rout. Elsie, who had taken refuge in a bedroom, heard roars of laughter from the bar. As she passed in she had been greeted with cries of 'Newchum!' and many jocular compliments. Mrs. Timbrow, who led her to a low-roofed room, was evidently anxious to lose no time in finding out who the newcomers were.

Elsie, tired and dizzy, threw herself on the bed, and covered her face with her handkerchief. Mrs. Timbrow suspected that she was weeping, but she kept plying her with questions as to her journey, and her husband and his intentions, and if she had any children, and if she wasn't very tired.

'Yes, very,' said Elsie from beneath her handkerchief.

'What's the likes o' you doin' here?' asked Mrs. Timbrow.

This only increased Elsie's sobbing, and Mrs. Timbrow, who was an enormous woman, sat down on the bed to comfort her.

'Stop sobbin'. They all begin that way, but I've not seen the likes o' you here before. Now, you're very purty, and just let me see yer face a bit,' said Mrs. Timbrow, drawing the corner of Elsie's handkerchief, which Elsie, however, held tightly at the other end. 'Look 'ee, what's wrong? Is that yer husband that came with you, and has he been beatin' you? He's lookin' for a place at Mr. Hirton's, maybe? But stop sobbin'; ye'll get used to't. When Timbrow first brought me here, I thought I'd just die, but I've got on capital, even though it was Timbrow himself as died, and we weren't five months out when it happened.'

Elsie asked for some tea, and Mrs. Timbrow went for it, hoping to find her in a better mood for conversation when she came back. In the bar she met Nicolay and Wharton, and she told Nicolay that the lady seemed thoroughly done up.

'He's got as purty a creatur' for a wife as ever came to Hirton's Run,' she said, addressing Wharton, who nodded and went on with his drink.

'But is she yer wife, come now?' continued Mrs. Timbrow, turning again to Nicolay. 'Is she, now? She's atop o' you, my boy, and ye're run away with her, that's it! Pappy and mammy weepin' their eyes out, maybe, in Old England over her!'

Nicolay shook his head, and told her to ask the truth from Elsie.

'Ask the troof from Elsie?' repeated Mrs. Timbrow. 'She's as silent as a mute, and is sufferin' awful.'

'She'll come round,' said Nicolay, and then sauntered out with Wharton to look at his horses, which were in about as bad a state as Elsie, thoroughly over-ridden.

The native boy was attending to them. And, indeed, Nicolay began to appear quite important to the loafers about the compound, since he had horses and a native boy. He was the best off newchum, they thought, who had ever arrived at the station.

When Mrs. Timbrow came back with the tea to Elsie, she found that the handkerchief was still covering her eyes. But when she sat down on the bed again, and called her Elsie, and said she wished to be quite friendly like to her, as she always was to strangers, Elsie drew off the handkerchief and looked her full in the face.

'La!' said Mrs. Timbrow, 'that's a dearie. Here's tea, and it'll do you good. Up here we don't even weep. As for myself, there ain't a drop left since Timbrow died. We become quite nat'r'al and life-like up here, and never weep. It's the old civilizations that weep, and not the new uns, as Timbrow used to say.'

Elsie thanked her for her attentions, and indicated that she would rather be left alone. Mrs. Timbrow thought it was the worst case she had seen, and when she suggested that it was only violent home-sickness, Elsie agreed by a nod of the head. But when Mrs. Timbrow, still sitting on the bed, began further questions about Nicolay and their prospects, and what the journey

had cost them, and how long Elsie had been married, Elsie begged her to allow her rest. So that Mrs. Timbrow retired convinced that the newcomer was an obstinate and secret slut with a bad history.

The truth was that, whereas during the journey Elsie had been able to keep up her courage, it completely gave-way as soon as she arrived at the cattle-station. A fixed resolve to escape back to her father took possession of her. She was thoroughly disgusted with Nicolay, but even had he been a much better man than he was, these trials and travels were more than she could bear.

Mrs. Timbrow soon spread it about that Elsie and Nicolay were for ever quarrelling. She listened at their door, she said, and heard astounding language, something quite new for Hirton's Run. Philosophizing on her own account, she maintained that the single life, whether of maidenhood or widowhood, was the better. She and Hirton had been old friends, and their afternoon chats in the bar-parlour were a regular item in the day's routine.

Nicolay began work in the stockyard, and he and Wharton seemed to be pulling well together. But nothing could persuade Elsie to leave Timbrow's Inn. She was as yet too much upset after the journey. Hirton had been told of her state more than once by Mrs. Timbrow, and he determined to do what he could for her. Very likely she was suffering from a low fever. And the fact that in Mrs. Timbrow's opinion she was as 'perty a wench' as ever came to Hirton's Run made him all the more curious to see her. By this time Mrs. Timbrow had persuaded Elsie to come now and again into

the parlour, so that Hirton might have a chance of seeing her. And one particular afternoon he got his heart's desire. Elsie was taking tea with Mrs. Timbrow, when Hirton walked in, bowed to his old friend, and said, on being introduced to Elsie, that he was charmed to bow to a new one. As a result of that interview, Hirton decided that Mrs. Timbrow's description of Elsie was in every way correct. He determined, moreover, on being very kind to Elsie. And since the best way of being kind to a woman is to take an interest in her husband, and push him forward, Hirton decided to promote Nicolay at once—to push him forward, in fact, thirty miles up-country, where he could superintend some manœuvres with cleanskins. And the whispers of Elsie's quarrels with him helped Hirton to mature his plans. Elsie, indeed, had in a weak moment said to Mrs. Timbrow that she would give anything to escape back to England. Moreover, she had heard that Wharton was returning shortly, and had asked him to take a letter to her father. She had already written the letter, in which she had described her intolerable life, and had prepared him for the news of her flight. Nay, the project of accompanying Wharton even flitted through her mind, although how it was to be accomplished her dreams never made plain to her. But Wharton had got to know it through the indefatigable Timbrow, and he felt flattered by Elsie's trust in him. At any rate, he had seen enough of Nicolay, and had heard enough, to be able on his return to excite Horneck with the news of his daughter's ill-matched existence. And at least Wharton was not responsible for a plot which was being hatched against Elsie, and of which he was to be one of

the instruments. Hirton, in fact, was desperately in love with her, and it is said that the love of a man in the Bush, who sees little of woman for weeks, is the maddest kind of all. He determined to possess her at all hazards, and he conceived a scheme for that purpose. By means of Mrs. Timbrow he posed as Elsie's protector, and she began to refer to him as a very kind gentleman indeed.

'The gentleman,' said Mrs. Timbrow, 'will see you through it all, and knows that you're just tremblin' to escape.'

Elsie said they were all very kind, but asked how the affair could be managed. Elsie, in short, became one of the factors in her own deception. She was told that Nicolay would soon be sent up-country on a long hunt after cleanskins. This was what he was evidently wishing, and when he came to tell Elsie about it, her forced duplicity compelled her to congratulate him. It was to be Wharton's last bit of work for Hirton before returning to England. And he was to go up with Nicolay to teach him how to manage the wild herds among the scrub, and bring them down safe to Norak. Well, then, Hirton hoped that Nicolay's inexperience might cost him his life, and even hinted to Wharton that, like Joab, he was to put this modern Uriah into the very thick of the danger, although he did not display his motive. He said that Nicolay was to be sent to 'head' the cattle, which is a difficult business. Nothing is easier, indeed, for an unsteady rider than to be unseated in these skirmishes with wild cattle, and even to be gored to death. Ten chances to one Nicolay would have a serious fall. He had never used a stockwhip. In fact,

he knew nothing of the terrors and trials of a wild hunt. During his absence with Wharton, Hirton would take possession of Elsie. It was a very brutal romance, no doubt, but it happened in the Bush.

Meantime Elsie was very grateful to her protectors, and felt herself thoroughly justified in her attempt to escape from Nicolay's odious companionship. She awaited his departure with calmness. In case she might not see Wharton, and in case he might arrive in England before her, she gave him the letter for her father. The day came, and Nicolay, Wharton, the black boy, and a few stockmen started for the scrub. As soon as they were out of sight and the cloud of dust raised by their horses had subsided on the far horizon, Elsie began her preparations. She was almost frantic with joy. Hirton came and chucked her under the chin, and asked if he would allow her to sob her pretty eyes out. Not he!

Elsie endured these familiarities because she was able to console herself that they would soon be over. She was to be driven to a railway-station which could be reached in a day's journey if a very early start were made. Consequently, next morning she was up at three o'clock, and soon she heard the carriage which was to take her drive up to the inn door. It was not really a carriage, but a spring-cart properly metamorphosed for the purpose.

The simple girl had even accepted a loan of money from Hirton, which would pay her expenses home, and would be repaid, so she assured him, as soon as she got to England. She gave him an I.O.U. for it. She felt that mankind were essentially angelic, and that their real goodness was only made the more manifest by con-

trast with the few exceptions like Nicolay. She was much surprised, however, to discover that Mr. Hirton's charity had not yet reached its limits. For after she had said good-bye to Mrs. Timbrow, who could hardly contain her laughter, and had got into the cart, she was astonished to see Mr. Hirton mount the box and take charge of the reins. No other human being, evidently, was going to accompany them. She protested against this vast kindness, but he said she protested too much, and so the spring-cart was soon being driven rapidly along the broad, dusty road.

Now, Mr. Hirton was a rough man, but his conduct had been hitherto so discreet, so chivalrous, that the most suspecting female would have found all her suspicions dozing off to sleep. Of course he had chucked Elsie under the chin, but doubtless that was only his rough, kind way. He had never molested her. He had hardly looked the road she was on. He could have sworn that he did not know even the exact colour of her eyes. That she was a pretty wench was obvious enough, but he had never told her so, or stared rudely at her, or given her to understand that she was anything more than an object of profound pity in his sight.

They had gone about half a mile on the down road from Norak, when she said that his kindness was really unutterable, and that her heart was quite full. She had no words to express her gratitude.

Hirton turned round in his seat, and brought his whip to his hat by way of salute, and said no, no, not at all; he could never have allowed anyone to conduct her except himself. At any rate, the day wore on, and he kept cheering her. They partook of snatches of lunch

by the way, and tried to protect themselves from the dreadful flies. It was a long, long journey, he told her. In fact, the terrible man was taking her, not south at all, but due north, on the road which led to one of his own substations, where he had first begun life as a squatter. The sun was high and the heat was atrocious, but he told Elsie to keep drinking from the quart pot, or 'Jack Shay,' as Bushmen call it, which the thoughtful Tim-brow had filled with a lemon drink.

The sun was high for hour upon hour, but even when he was beginning to fall, and the heat was diminishing, there was as yet no railway visible. In the distance she saw only wonderful blue mountains, which seemed to recede as she advanced. Would the journey never end? Surely the horses, which had been drawn up for a rest and a feed only twice under great trees, whose names she did not know, were ready to drop? But they were going still rapidly over the dusty road. The plain had seemed interminable under the dazzling light of the sun, but now, as the skies were growing paler, it seemed to grow vaster and vaster. A slight consciousness of her own excitement and a vague sense of danger began to trouble Elsie as she passed mile after mile of uninhabited country.

All round her was the hum of mosquitoes, and she was conscious that numerous bright-plumaged birds were in the air, but she let them pass unheeded. She kept straining her eyes towards the intolerable horizon; but it was growing denser and dimmer.

Hirton had driven his horses skilfully, for they were not yet tired, although they had covered forty miles. Elsie, sitting behind, and feeling that her nerves were get-

ting out of her control, asked feebly if they were nearing the railway. A curious feeling of the madness of her enterprise had suddenly seized her. Hirton, without turning round, answered her questions by shaking his head.

After he had taken his horses round a difficult bend of the road, he then turned and said that they had gone slower than he had expected. He had no lights, and it was necessary to hurry on. He looked at her, and saw that she was sitting as pale as a pale autumn leaf. Perhaps, he said, it would be necessary to put up for the night at a house he knew. A faint smile of troubled acquiescence and conciliation passed over her cheeks, while she said nothing.

'Eh, my girl?' called Hirton in a strange loud voice.  
'Eh, darlin'?

'No doubt you know best, Mr. Hirton. I'm sure you do,' said Elsie, wringing the words out of her throat.

The cruel night, lover of crime, descended and descended—the feline night, with soft, cruel paws for catching weak, harmless things. The shriek of the night-birds and the wallabies had begun, and she saw the wings of great bats tinged red with the after-glow of the sun. And now and again she saw also an emu, or Australian ostrich, outlined against the sky where it was opal. Also the terrible blight-fly was at work pricking her skin. Involuntarily she gave a little cry, at which Hirton turned round to say 'Eh, dear?' She did not hear him, however. She heard nothing except the noise of the horses and of the wheels, mixed now and again with the horrible cracking of the whip.

At length Hirton cried 'Here we are!' and Elsie perceived through the dusk that they were nearing a homestead, and that there were low bushes on each side of the approach up which she was being rapidly driven. Presently lights appeared in a straggling low-built house at which Hirton pulled up. Two natives with lanterns came out to attend to the horses, while a black woman, holding another lantern, stood at the door. The whites of their eyes and their gleaming black skin showed up strangely against the light of the lanterns.

Hirton alighted, and helped Elsie down, while her luggage—such as it was—was looked after by one of the blacks. Elsie, almost fainting, and quite dumb, groped her way towards the door, but while she was crossing the threshold her instinct made her ask Hirton whose house it was. He said, with a laugh, that it was a very charming hotel, and that presently the moon would come out and light up the grounds. Everything seemed to imply, however, that Hirton was thoroughly at home in the place, and that his arrival had been expected. The house certainly did not give Elsie the impression of being a hotel.

As she passed the door of a lighted room, she noticed that supper was set for two, and a sickening feeling of despair began to possess her. Hirton's strange silence and the darkness of the place seemed to increase her fears. But she determined to keep her head. She was fully alive to her danger, although she still hoped that there was no cause for her timidity. The woman, who was bare at the breasts, curtseying before her, and still carrying the lantern, led her, at Hirton's bidding, into a

room at the end of one of the passages. The building consisted of only the ground-floor, and seemed to be full of intricate and interminable windings.

When Elsie found herself in a room not unlike the one she had vacated at Mrs. Timbrow's, she stood in the middle of it wondering whether she should spring out of the window. But she determined meantime to feign acquiescence. As soon as the woman left, she peered out on the veranda, which seemed to run all round the house. She heard the report of a gun in the vicinity, which she explained as likely to have come from someone shooting rabbits, with which, as Hirton told her, the district swarmed. She saw poultry moving about the lawn, and springing and fluttering up to the trees for the roost. A cock gave a faint little crow, which sounded curious in the dusk. She started at the sound of feet behind her, and when she turned she saw Hirton grinning.

'Yes, this is your room. I just wish to see if everything is right, you know,' he said, as he went to shut the windows on the veranda. 'Your room will be full of mosquitoes unless these windows are shut. Supper is ready.'

'Mr. Hirton,' she began, although falteringly—'really . . . Mr. Hirton, I wish to know, please . . . where I am.'

'You're in the first house I ever built in Australia,' said Hirton.

'I am more than obliged,' she continued with increasing excitement; 'but I thought I was to be at the railway to-night. I thought you said, at first that this was a hotel?'

'Now, my duck, isn't this far better than a railway or a hotel? What could a railway do but take you away from me?'

'Oh . . . oh!' cried Elsie; 'I am alone!'

But her cry was muffled by the thick curtains which clothed the walls.

'Why, not at all,' said Hirton. 'Cheer up; you'll be at the railway to-morrow, you know. Don't be frightened, little girl, but come to supper. What's up?'

She gave a vast sigh of relief, and asked him to excuse her. She was nervous, she said, and he replied, no wonder, after having had to live with a man like Nicolay. She tried to regain confidence, and thanked him, muttering that he was very kind. But she muttered it the way the Greeks muttered 'Eumenides' when they meant the Furies, as if to create kindness in terrible things by giving them kind names.

As yet, it was not so much anything the man himself had said or had done which made her so afraid. But in the glow of the lantern she had seen the black woman smirk, and turn her lips almost inside out in a gesture whose terrific meaning made Elsie aghast. The atmosphere was stifling. She heard the hum of the cicala outside, and the screaming of the bats and the wallabies, and the low night-bellow of a stray bullock, and the occasional neigh of a horse. But those sounds quietened and assured her, rather; for they seemed to indicate that the place was a station of some size, containing, perhaps, other white people besides Hirton and herself. At any rate, she did not wish to show her strange host that she now distrusted him absolutely. She tried still to keep her head. And yet, in comparison with such a

man, Nicolay seemed a protector. She would have fled to him for safety if he had been near. How bitterly she had been punished! She had no doubt now that she had been kidnapped.

Hirton told her to come to supper in tones of command which she trembled to disobey. She saw that he was treating her as a slave, and she passed to the dining-room at his bidding.

He told her to sit down, but for all she knew every dish he offered might be drugged. A plate of salted beef was smoking on the table, and at the other end there was a plate of unskinned potatoes surrounded by hot rice.

Hirton sat down to carve the beef, while she sat opposite him. Besides the beef and potatoes there were tin tankards of ale and a bottle of whisky, together with bread, fruit, and cheese. He told her to make a hearty wedding-supper, and then he said nothing until he had eaten for about ten minutes. As a matter of fact, Elsie, who had been ravenous during the journey, could now hardly crush a crumb of bread down her throat. She let her eyes fall now and again on the man opposite her. His silence was the most unbearable thing of all. She heard nothing but the sound of his jaws. And yet, although she knew that whenever he spoke she would listen in terror, she felt that unless she broke the silence herself she would go into convulsions.

'What is the name of this place, Mr. Hirton?' she asked in a tone of affected confidence, as if his explanations a few minutes ago had satisfied her.

'Bethsaida,' he said. 'That's Scriptural, ain't it?'

'Yes, and it promises Scriptural conduct,' she replied,

whereupon he congratulated her on being a sharp young woman indeed.

He leered and winked at her till the blood began to leave her face. Her replies to his insidious questions seemed to fall mechanically from her lips. She was almost glad, however, when he began to question her on her own people.

'Yes,' she said, 'my uncle is Sir Ralph Horneck, well known in Yorkshire.'

'Ah, really,' said Hirton, glaring over at her. 'I know Yorkshire too. And what are *you* doing so far away from it? Marriage a mistake, maybe? Married against uncle's or papa's wish, eh? Wharton and Mrs. Timbrow have been telling me all about it. Nicolay hasn't turned out the promising man you expected? Well, then, my girl, how about *me*? You're one of the purtiest girls, as Mrs. Timbrow says, that ever came to Hirton's Run. And the best thing you've done is to have run away with Hirton, hem ?

Elsie said nothing.

'You're not eating, my girl—you're not eating!' exclaimed Hirton. 'Make yourself at home. It's going to be your home at least for this night, eh ?'

She ventured to look and fling on him the indignant reproach of her eyes. But when she found that *his* eyes were fixed and glittering on her, involuntarily she gave a great cry, while Hirton shrugged his shoulders.

'Really, Mr. Hirton,' she said, 'I am vexed that I have been such a trouble, and have taken you so far out of your way.'

'No, no ! I was coming up this way in any case,' he replied. 'Be at your ease, my pet.'

Elsie then utterly broke down, and murmured that she hoped indeed he was a gentleman, and that it was a terrible thing for a girl like her to be in the hands of a stranger, and so far from her friends. She implored him to take her back to Nicolay, rather.

'Now, look you,' he said: 'what do you think he would say? Isn't it true that you asked me to take you? Isn't it true that you asked me for money? Devil a bit! What are you thinking of?'

'Yes, I admit it. It is all true as you say. I had no right to wish to run away. I had no right to ask you for money,' she said, thoroughly worsted and overcome.

'Cheer up, then—cheer up!' said Hirton. 'You never want to see Nicolay again. Isn't it true? You want to see me though, eh, old girl? What d'you think Nicolay could do to me out here on these wilds? We could soon bung his mouth up. What'll happen 'll be this: We'll go back to Norak, and you'll be my wife. We'll send Nicolay about his business, that's it! We'll be man and wife from this night, I promise you. Come, Elsie, eh?

"Come back to Norak,  
Mavourneen, mavourneen!"

And then he rallied her, and laughed and cajoled over her, and howled down her 'No, no! never! It will never be *that!*'

The truth was, he had been drinking glass after glass, and was becoming hilarious. She hoped he would go on drinking till he was dead-drunk. It meant her only chance, perhaps.

'Now, look 'ee, my darlin', mavourneen! just the purtiest gal, ain't you, as ever blessed Hirton? No use runnin' away. We've—hic—got to spend the night together.'

There's women need courtin' and cajolin', and perhaps you're one of them. There's others need none, and perhaps you're one of *them*. But in any case here's Jack Hirton !

He then lurched towards her, seized her by the wrists, and dragged her on her knees. It was all very amusing to the black boys, who were grinning on the veranda. It was not the first time they had seen Hirton drunk, and with a woman. When his back was turned, they came in and pilfered things from the table, hunks of beef and of bread, and then ran out. Hirton turned round, caught one in the act, and kicked him bodily on to the veranda. The room was swarming with mosquitoes and fireflies, and Hirton reeled towards the veranda and slammed the glass-doors. Elsie had risen. Her instinct told her to humour him rather than thwart him. But she hoped that he would soon be insensible or delirious. She sat at the table again.

'Here—hic—my girl. It's a bargain. We'll go back to Norak, and start life together.'

Elsie said all right, and poured him another glass of whisky. He took it, mumbling drunken thanks, and saying that she was a 'ripping gal.' She thought that in a few minutes she might be able to escape to her room. He had threatened to keep her sitting up all night, but he was now becoming more helpless every moment. He came staggering over to her, but just missed her, and fell heavily on the floor. Elsie then left him, and ran to her room. She would escape, she hoped, in the gray of the morning.

Meantime she fastened her door and the window, and

lit her candle. When she held up the candle at the mirror, she seemed to have the expression of haggard insanity in her face. She lay down on the bed, however, dressed as she was, and determined to keep awake. But sheer weariness overcame her, and she must have been asleep about two hours, when she awoke conscious of a loud noise at the door. Hirton was pitching himself against it, and in a moment it would give way, because the lock was fragile and the panels were of thin timber. Before she had time to rush to the window, through which the gray morning was already breaking, the door burst open, but Hirton fell with a crash on the ground, bruised by the splinters of the wood. Happily, too, he had struck his head on an iron fender with which Elsie had barricaded the door.

The black servants came running, and Hirton, cursing and swearing, gave orders in native dialect that she was to be seized. Consequently, two black fellows took hold of her, but she struck them both off. Other three came, attracted by the noise, and she was soon a prisoner in their hands. Hirton, however, was past molesting anyone that day. He was taken to his bed, and luckily the blacks kept on administering whisky in full measure, so that he was rendered still further harmless.

Elsie tried to bribe the blacks, but fear of Hirton prevented them allowing her to escape. They put her in the chains in which Hirton used to incarcerate themselves when they were disobedient. They brought her milk and bread for breakfast, but she had to sit chained all day in the broiling sun, awaiting Hirton's recovery. He was so thoroughly ill, however, that he remained

more or less insensible for the next forty-eight hours, while Elsie was in the hands of the blacks.

But, after all, she was to be delivered from her peril by none other than Nicolay. In fact, Nicolay was speeding to her rescue, and she would soon see a cloud of dust on the blazing road. For Hirton's plot had leaked out among the stockmen whom Nicolay and Wharton had taken up-country for the raid on the clean-skins. It came to Nicolay's ears, in fact, the night after they had left Hirton's Run. As they were sitting round the camp-fire on the borders of the scrub, one of the men, laughing and joking, told the astonished husband that he was at last well quit of his wife. For they all knew that she was an additional expense to him, and that he was wishing to get rid of her.

When the stockman, with the fire-blaze shining on his face, said quite merrily that she was very likely taking supper with Hirton that very moment in some snug corner of his own choosing in the wilds, Nicolay started up amid the loud laughter of the rest. He glanced at Wharton, who was scowling into the fire, and asked if the infernal news was true.

Wharton said very likely indeed, since it was an ancient trick of Hirton's to cajole young ladies, married or single. Many a girl had been taken down to Bethsaida by the fierce squatter, but he warned Nicolay that it was never the girl's fault. The fact was that Wharton, who was to leave for England the week after, felt no further obligations to Hirton, with whom, indeed, he had almost quarrelled the week before, and he began to discuss his character very freely.

Nicolay, becoming very violent, afforded the company

undoubted amusement. They were all astonished at his passion, for they had expected him to thank Heaven for such a delivery. On the contrary, he was filled with madness against Elsie. No doubt on the way up he had been wishing to get rid of her, but no sooner are an enemy's hands laid on the most worthless property than it begins to assume in its owner's sight a disproportionate value.

Wharton could hardly prevent the enraged man mounting his horse and galloping down the midnight road to Norak. He agreed, however, to remain till sunrise. Indeed, he was the only wakeful person that night, and he watched the camp-fire die down, and heard the howls of the dingoes long after his companions were snoring all round him. He had not come out to Australia to be duped and befooled by a woman. In vain Wharton had exposed Hirton's character, and had said that very likely the girl had been kidnapped. No, no; Nicolay was convinced of treachery. He clenched his fists more tightly, and determined to have her back.

Thus, although he had had a hard day's ride, and had 'headed' the wild cattle more than once, and was thoroughly fatigued and ready for a long sleep, he slept no moment of that night. He saddled one of the fresh, unridden horses and left the camp before sunrise, and was soon spurring his beast down the Norak road. When he arrived at Timbrow's Inn, more like a madman, and demanded his wife, Mrs. Timbrow, coming out to see what was wrong, told him the whole story of Elsie's plot to get away. When Nicolay asked furiously if it was Elsie herself who had asked to be taken away, Mrs. Timbrow laughed very heartily, and said :

'I should think so, just!'

At this he ran to Hirton's stables, seized and saddled one of Hirton's horses, and, taking an extra one with him, was within an hour well forward on the Bethsaida road. His vengeance seemed to increase with the rate of his beast, for he followed the track of Hirton's guilty wheels. He covered the distance in half the time, moreover, and in the afternoon arrived at Bethsaida, where Elsie was sitting terrified in the sun. At sight of him she gave a shriek half of joy and half of alarm, for she did not know in what mood he would be. He came up to her in silence, however, which she herself broke by exclaiming :

'I am innocent!'

Some of the blacks ran in to apprise Hirton, and when they returned signed to Nicolay to go in to him. Nicolay, however, whether personally afraid of Hirton or too anxious to escape with his prey, went to the stables and yoked the horses of the cart which had brought Elsie to Bethsaida. The fact that Elsie was in chains had somewhat mitigated his fury, for it meant that acquiescence had not yet been wrung from her. But, still, she was terrorized by his appearance, and by the consciousness that she had sought Hirton's assistance in her flight. Moreover, she had his money, and what was she to do with it?

Hirton, however, apprised anew by the blacks of Nicolay's preparations, was evidently thankful to get quit of him on such easy terms, for the blacks came out again to assist Nicolay in making the horses ready. He dragged Elsie still chained into the cart, although she came quite readily, and then started for Norak, maintaining his silence.

They passed the night on the road, Elsie sobbing and asking his forgiveness.

Nicolay had ordered the black boy to meet them with his own horses and saddle-bags two miles from Norak, at the point where the road going west parts from the road going east. He determined not to pass through Norak, in order to avoid Mrs. Timbrow's jeers and the insolent comments of other minions of the omnipotent Hirton. In a savage ill-humour he was taking Elsie up-country by the other road on the long quest for gold. He had had enough of Hirton and of Hirton's Run. The boy met them as appointed, and Nicolay and Elsie got down from the cart and mounted their beasts. The boy was to take the cart back to Norak, and overtake them later.

Meantime Elsie resigned herself as best she could to Nicolay's mad enterprises. On the whole, she had reason to be thankful to him for the deliverance from Hirton, and as yet had suffered no reprisals. When she explained everything quite truthfully, and said that she had really been frightened, and had plotted to escape back to her father, but now asked forgiveness and hoped they would live in peace together for the future, Nicolay, unable to doubt her, seemed quite pleased at her submission and at her preference for himself. Moreover, when she handed him Hirton's money, which she said was legitimately theirs, since double, and more than double, would have been awarded them by a court of law as compensation for Hirton's infamy, Nicolay, too, pleased to grow angry at the way she had got it, said that really she had a head on her, after all, and was actually a good rogue. So that when the black boy

rejoined them they set out on their journey in better spirits, poor Elsie determining at last to make the best of it. She was almost sorry, indeed, that she would not have an opportunity of seeing Wharton, to ask back the letter she had given him for Horneck, and in which she had poured forth her recriminations against her husband. She even questioned Nicolay as to Wharton's whereabouts, without giving him the reason ; but he said they were not going that way, and so could not see him. In fact, they were taking the road that led into the north of Central Australia, where large tribes of blacks still wander.

The native boy knew the road well, since it was leading him to his own haunts, whence he had emerged a year before, curious about the civilization of the white man. There was no fear that they would run short of provisions, because he could easily catch kangaroos, as he had done before for them. They had got used to those rough-and-ready open-air feasts. They were now gradually leaving the pasture-land, and often encamped for the night in rocky regions, where, although there was enough water, there was little game. Even among the rocks, however, the boy succeeded in running down young kangaroos ; and Elsie admitted that the flesh was perfectly delicious.

For the sake of the horses, they were taking the journey slowly. They soon arrived, however, within sight of Mount Stuart and the Ashburton Range, and had passed through a gloomy and rocky valley wooded on both sides. Even Nicolay began to feel slightly nervous, as they gradually left the settlements of white men far behind, and he questioned the boy earnestly on

the reality of the gold quest on which they had started. For it was still the glitter of gold which was occupying Nicolay's thought. He had read in a Queensland newspaper that not far from where he was, gold, valued at four guineas an ounce, had been found. So that he had taken all his tools and implements with him, and expected to return with his saddle-bags full of gold.

He spent many a hot forenoon, therefore, digging in the river-beds, to see if any glimmer of gold might flash upon him while Elsie did a washing in the water. But as yet no success attended these efforts, and Nicolay, like a wretched, disillusioned gambusino and 'fossicker,' went from one river-bed to another and began to curse the boy. Even supposing he found the treasure he sought, how was he to know that he was not being watched by hostile eyes from every secret ravine and caye that surrounded him? Everyone knows that the early gold-seekers encountered frightful tragedies. No sooner were they successful in discovering virgin soil than they were 'stuck up' by hordes of blacks. An aboriginal's assegai might be ready to be dropped on Nicolay at any moment, therefore. Besides, the horses were suffering from want of proper fodder, Elsie was turning ill, and Nicolay himself had the germs of Bush fever in him. Even the boy began to lose enthusiasm, and to cease his everlasting 'Yowwy budgeree!'.

One night he came back to their stopping-place after a hunt for game, and told Nicolay that he had heard in the next valley strange cries of blacks—cries utterly different from those of his own tribe. He advised Nicolay to retreat that night, even. But the weary man was hardly fit for any such midnight expedition over moonless rocky paths, and with stumbling horses. He

suggested; rather, that they should conceal themselves in a cave near at hand. It began to appear that Elsie was the bravest of the three, because she took their fears quite calmly, and told Nicolay to muster up a little courage, and to give her a revolver.

They spent the night in the cave, however, and, instead of hearing any sounds of the savages, heard only the savage howls of the famished dingoes springing from rock to rock. Nevertheless, the native boy continued to warn Nicolay that the blacks of those parts, not having had intercourse with white men, were peculiarly savage. Many a gold-seeker, indeed, who had wandered into the region in hope of secret gain in undigged ground, had gone a-missing, and the blacks were never to be found, because on the advance of the search-party they always retired with their victim into their own haunts.

It was the first time the boy had betrayed excitement, and the startled Nicolay wondered at it, and thought it ominous, since he never expected blacks to be afraid of each other. But the boy kept listening, and said he heard the sounds of a camp on the other side of the gully. And, as a matter of fact, next morning proved that his sharp native ears had not been deceived. For he, Nicolay, and Elsie had hardly stirred from their hiding-place, when about fifty blacks, most of them with spears, were seen advancing up one side of the narrow gorge through which the river was flowing, the river in which Nicolay had hoped to find gold.

The native boy gave the cry of alarm, but before Nicolay and Elsie had time to unhobble their horses and mount them they were surrounded by naked blacks, who came upon them with a yell which resounded up the cliffs. They had the blackest curly hair, and were

rather short than tall, and of excessively degraded appearance. The boy shouted to Nicolay that they were cannibals.. A few women were among them, and they began to handle Elsie, and tear off her clothes, and shout strange cries into her ears, and were so hideous and offensive that she began to struggle and shriek back at them in terror.

As for Nicolay, he was as white as the paper of this book, and was expostulating as vigorously as he could with some half-dozen blacks, who had seized him and laid him on the ground. Had he had his pistol, and had fired it, doubtless they would have run away, because those aborigines are terrified by firearms. But neither he nor Elsie had had time to pick up these appendages of romance. So that the affair turned out to be the most hideously unromantic adventure ever recorded in a book.

Meantime a wild altercation was taking place between the native boy and the tallest of the blacks, who was their leader. It seems that they were only the advance part of a tribe encamped in the next valley, but who were about to change their quarters. For these blacks have no settled habitations, but move constantly from one place to another, and live entirely in the open air, without even mia-mjas. Well, then, the boy was surrounded, like Nicolay and Elsie, and he and the chief were jabbering in a heathenish dialect. The chief kept pointing to Elsie, and rubbing his stomach, as if to indicate that she would make a tolerable meal, while the boy kept shaking his head and pointing to Nicolay. The boy was right. Those blacks become cannibals under special circumstances, and the fact that that season had been rather scarce in game and reptiles like

snakes, frogs and lizards, and other crawling things such as those appalling creatures eat, made it highly probable that the two Europeans might be converted into a suitable dish for the whole tribe.

Presently the boy, followed by the chief, was allowed to advance to Nicolay, who was being held down by his six native assailants, and began to speak to him. The jabbering ceased, and in the sudden dead silence that fell all round Elsie heard every word that was said. Nicolay, in fact, was ordering the boy to interpret to the chief that if he (Nicolay) were allowed to go free, he would make him a present of Elsie.

When Elsie heard these words she almost fainted, but she cast one frantic glance at Nicolay. Everyone awaited the chief's reply ; he did not hesitate. Then, without looking at Elsie, Nicolay nodded to him, and was immediately released. Then the chief came up to Elsie, who was dragged screaming into his hideous arms. 'O God, save me ! O God !' she screamed. Never did Nicolay forget that scream.

Long after, when he used to narrate to Horneck lie after lie about her fearful death under the golden-wattle-tree, as he invented the story, the scream came into his ears, and he seemed to see her struggling again among the black-limbed tribe.

Now, how the man made up his saddlebags, and mounted his horse and started without looking behind ; how he rode back into civilization, and lost his way a hundred times ; dreamed dreadful dreams in the midnight forest, and plucked a leaf of the golden-wattle, with which to dupe Horneck as a memento of the place of her burial ; lay at a cattle-station (not Norak) half dead with fever for a month, and then, determining to flee

from Australia, came back to London at last with a face, every feature of it, thoroughly conquered by crime, and quite ready for detection—all this the reader will be spared.

We know, of course, already that the crime-burdened man did come back, since he married Millicent Heath. But at first he spent some time in London. There, troubled and tormented by his conscience and the memory of the poor girl's cries, which kept ringing, ringing in his ears, he was driven to walk along the Strand again. He looked up at Horneck's window, where he used to see Elsie smiling over to him. His shop was now a bootmaker's, but the new coat of paint on the signboard had not effaced the old marks of his own name, and he saw the dim tracings of it with a kind of fear and wonder.

Anxious to retain all his friends, he informed most of them, and among them Edwin Rewbell, that he had returned. But for a long time he hesitated to go up to Horneck to tell him the false story of Elsie's death. One day, however, he was startled to see a young woman at the window, who, of course, was none other than the blind Harriet, poor girl! still listening with delight to the roar of the Strand. He wondered if Horneck had married again, and if this might be his wife. Something or other drove him to go up to see his father-in-law. He began to think that any day he might meet him in the street, and it would be terribly awkward. So he went in terror up Horneck's dark and worn stair. At his entrance, Horneck, who was reading a book, lifted up his hands in amazement, and the first thing he asked was:

‘Where's Elsie?’

Nicolay, with a face feigning grief, and all subdued

With spurious sorrow, shook his head, and took out the leaf of the golden-wattle from his pocket-book, and told Horneck that the tree from which it came marked dear Elsie's grave. She had died of fever, he said—the same fever whose effects the doctor might see on Nicolay himself. Horneck burst into a flood of tears, whereupon Harriet, who had never heard him sob so loudly, came from the adjoining room, and asked what was wrong.

'Elsie is dead!' said Horneck. 'Here is her husband come to tell us! Oh gracious! *dead*, do you say?'

Harriet tried to comfort him, but he was anxious, in spite of his grief, to ask Nicolay questions.

'When did it happen, and where?' asked Horneck, with the tears bubbling in his eyes.

Nicolay invented place and date there and then, and added that it was in the wilds on a stormy night, far from the settlements of white men. When Horneck asked further why he had taken her there, Nicolay shed tears, and pressed Horneck's hand, and said he now cursed Australia for having robbed him of her.

'Were you kind to her?' asked Horneck, with a strange mixed look of shrewdness and grief.

Nicolay replied that indeed he was, and that he would never survive the loss. But when Horneck went further, and asked why he had withheld the news so long, Nicolay pointed out that he had himself been at death's door, and had only recovered on the voyage home. Horneck had put these questions because he had in his pocket Elsie's letter, which Wharton, who was now at Eight Bells, had faithfully delivered. Ever since he had received it Horneck had been uneasy, because Elsie had said that Nicolay's company was intolerable, and that she was planning her escape.

At the mention of a letter, Nicolay started in confusion, reddening all over, and Horneck did not miss his embarrassment. But he replied yes, yes, he remembered; Elsie had written at a time when she was very homesick and anxious to leave Australia, but he had succeeded in reconciling her to it in the end.

'Why had she not written again, then?' asked Horneck.

But Nicolay was ready with the reply that she had been too ill. Even at that moment, however, Horneck had vague feelings of distrust of him. He asked what he intended to do—if he intended to take up shop again, for instance. But Nicolay said he didn't know. And then Horneck, always coming back to his dear Elsie, would break down once more. He told his son-in-law to come back soon, to give him these griefs all over again. Meantime he introduced his blind Harriet, who would now require to fill lost Elsie's place.

But, after a fortnight had passed, and there was still no sign of Nicolay's return, Horneck, in a fever of grief, ran down to Crayen Street to question him on these details anew. When he arrived at the old lodgings and asked for Nicolay, the landlady said he had left for Eight Bells, in Sussex, ten days before, having been summoned there by telegram. Nicolay, indeed, had been careless enough to leave the telegram on his parlour table, and the landlady brought it for Horneck's inspection. It was no other than Rewbell's telegram questioning him as to his willingness to take over Millicent Heath, and her dowry and her sin.

When Horneck read the cynical telegram, which ran, 'Will you make hymen with maiden to whom mishap has come? Lord M.; good prospects.—REWBELL,'

unable to restrain his astonishment, he asked the landlady if the man had actually gone down to Sussex to get married again already.

'That he has,' said the landlady, who was Scotch, 'and went away quite spruce and dapper-like. I wonder what the mishap is. The poor thing may have broken her leg. Doubtless it's one of these matrimonial agencies that's been looking out for one for him. I never believed in them. But Mr. Nicolay has been so restless and sleepless ever since he came home, that I said to him: "Man, take another wife to yourself. Ye can't do without one." And he's taken the advice, sure enough!'

Horneck left the woman before she had well finished her sentence, went hurriedly back to Harriet and told her that he would be absent for some days, and then took train to Eight Bells. Some sleuth instinct drove him to chase Nicolay, and, as we know, he even accompanied him to the bedside of the late Earl of Momesson. So that now we have arrived again at placid little Eight Bells, which is to be the scene of all these commingled passions.

## CHAPTER V

### EIGHT BELLS

EVER since Harold had come of age, Lady Mompesson had been vainly endeavouring to persuade him to go back to Oxford. It was now the end of February, and she asked him to make up his mind to begin the new term after Easter. It was nothing that he was now Lord Mompesson, if he was not thoroughly educated. That he had already mismanaged his estate there could be no doubt, she thought. The three new cottages, which had just reached completion, and were being taken over by their respective tenants, Nicolay, Horneck and Wharton, stood at a short distance from the gates of North Bayton, defacing the roadway and the approaches to the ancient seat of the Mompessons. Every time the old lady drove to and from Eight Bells, she required to pass these insolent cottages. The brick walls surrounding their little gardens had been newly built, and the slates of the roofs had not yet had a shower of rain.

It was still Lady Mompesson's fixed belief that they were Rewbell's work, and had been devised for the shelter of his needy friends. He had waited, she thought, until her husband's death to take advantage of

her son's inexperience and generosity. When Rewbell stoutly maintained that Horneck was not his friend at all, and that he had already complained to the young lord about Wharton's insolence, she only looked at him penetratingly, and asked about Nicolay. It was hard to have to withhold the truth from her.

'The late Earl,' she said, 'whom you professed to serve with affection, would never have sanctioned the presence of that man on the estate, and certainly never would have built a special cottage for him. Why, among all others, has *he* been selected, supposing that there was a necessity for building cottages at all? I told Millicent, who has so shocked me, that I never wished to see her again, and now she and the man who misled her are planted under my very eyes, at my very gates. It is monstrous! And I should have stopped it before Harold came of age.'

It was difficult to keep from telling her that it was the late Earl, and none other, who had planted Millicent there. But for the sake of his promise to Porlock, and partly also for the sake of his promise to the dead, Rewbell determined to keep the secret, and to betray it only on great provocation, and when his own interests might be imperilled by withholding it. That moment would come, because Lady Mompesson had decided to take the advice of Leaf and Merridge, who had not yet made up the estate accounts.

Meantime, Millicent and Nicolay had bought furniture and were already installed. The much-travelled man seemed to have found luck at last. But Horneck, who had now brought with him Harriet and her mother's furniture, was living next door, and some of his side-windows looked into the side-windows of Nicolay's

cottage, so that Nicolay had an imminent scourge as a neighbour. Wharton, with old raving Heath, lived in the last of the three houses.

Harold's wish that Wharton should have a little cottage of his own had coincided with Rewbell's arrangements for providing for old Heath. And, at least, on this point Lady Mompesson was satisfied, because she was shown a paper attached to the will of her husband, in which he had provided thus generously for the bankrupt miller. Why Heath and his daughter could not live together was doubtless explained by their old quarrel. But the presence of these six people housed at the principal entrance to the castle was the continual subject of her ladyship's astonishment. She meant to avoid and ignore Millicent, and although she was told that Millicent was about to give birth to a child, her severity did not relax.

Millicent, in fact, would shortly give birth to the late Earl's child. And when one day she told Nicolay that she was feeling very ill, and required Horneck's assistance, Nicolay told her she wasn't to have it, and if there wasn't another doctor at Eight Bells, she would just require to do without one altogether. At this she began to scream, and Horneck, hearing the screams through his open window, and thinking that at last her hour had come, ran out and jumped the low wall which separated his own garden from Nicolay's, and entered the cottage to ask what was wrong.

Nicolay told him it was no business of his, and that unless he kept to his own cottage complaints would be made to Lord Mompesson. But Millicent kept calling the doctor, and urging him to come, so that, brushing Nicolay aside, he went to her rescue, and eased her for

the moment. Old Heath, too, used to come in to bother Nicolay, and he began to think that a man who possesses two fathers-in-law deserves pity. Old Heath generally went raving to his daughter's bedside, demanding to see his grandson, who was not yet born (and, for that matter, who in the world knew whether it wouldn't be a girl?), and offering to celebrate the infant's entrance into the world with ironical thanksgivings.

Wharton, too busy up at the stables, allowed old Heath to rampage about the cottages, much to Horneck's amusement and Millicent's terror. For sometimes for hours he refused to move out of Nicolay's little garden.

On the whole, these new tenants on the North Bayton estate were rather an extraordinary set, and Lady Mompesson, when she sat down to consider her son's follies, generosities, horses, debts, and other forms of youthful madness, felt that the downfall of her house was close at hand. Doubtless the boy would sooner or later plunge into some matrimonial folly, and his career would be then complete. Diplomacy, statecraft, the House of Lords, even the Army or the Navy or the Church—since some lords become parsons—those were the goals at which she would have been content to see him aiming.

But, instead, he would lend a fine cob to Dr. Horneck, and go a-riding with him over the far downs, and a-lunching with him in the little villages and coast towns of Sussex, making his name cheap, and giving it freely away for slander and gossip. It seemed strange that a boy nobly born could behave in such a way—a Mompesson! Were the vows he made when he came of age not broken already?

Harold, however, was thoroughly enjoying himself, hunting like a glorious young madman in scarlet, with spring blood in his veins, spring freshness in his veins, and making everyone smile and be happy by sheer infection wherever he went. For, after all, a smile *is* infectious—far more infectious than a frown, for instance. Well, then, that is the fine maddening time of the year when larks rise and Spring's matin-bell sounds from village to village. And Harold "was in those roomy years of youth which are like great, gorgeous gardens, limitless, infinite, heaped !

O sweet o' the year ! I knew the sun, I knew his glory on an upland and in the valleys. I knew where his feet dropped gold and his footprints were fine gold. And I followed rivers to their sources, where they came pouring out of the lap of the mysterious Earth Mother. Ah, but are these spread lightnings and firmaments of youth, this kingdom and victory of light, already vanished ? Ah, but is the gate already shut to—gate of 'the magic and forgotten gardens of youth !'

Not, certainly, for Harold. He was in those rapid, courageous, full-hearted days of 'young passion. It was charming to see him forget that he was a great lord in his intimacy with Horneck. But, after all, as he pointed out to his mother, Horneck came of a family perhaps older than the Mompessons, and had only been unlucky. His admiration for the great dark, baffled man might be trying enough to poor old Porlock, for it proved that Harold found Horneck more interesting than his old tutor had ever been. But it proved also that he had some rudiments of idealism in him.

He was always anxious to hear Horneck's opinion on any subject. And in spite of all his boyish ardour for

the Vicar, he began to ask advice from Horneck, and to open his soul to him in a way he had never done to Porlock. He began to think that it would be more profitable to listen to Dr. Horneck than to attend lectures at Oxford. So that when his mother urged him to go back to his professors, he said :

‘ No, mother. Dr. Horneck is worth a hundred professors ! ’

‘ I suppose,’ she replied, ‘ you think he will be a better companion for you, and a better friend than Mr. Porlock ? ’

‘ Oh, well,’ said Harold, ‘ poor old Pory isn’t as modern as Dr. Horneck. He knows nothing except hunting and psalm-singing.’

‘ He knows what will keep you from falling, Harold ! ’ exclaimed his mother. ‘ The day was when you loved him, and never would have spoken in such a way about him.’

‘ Have I said anything against old Pory ? —not I,’ said Harold.

‘ Mr. Porlock is not a parasite, at least. He has not wrung a cottage from you, and a horse, and I know not what all ! ’

‘ Dr. Horneck,’ said Harold, ‘ pays a rent for his cottage, and I have only lent him a horse. He is a very wonderful man, mother.’

‘ And I hear that he, too, was familiar with that man Nicolay before they came here. This is an extraordinary situation. I feel as if there is a conspiracy against you. But how often have I spoken in vain about it ! ’ she exclaimed, in irritation. ‘ I only warn you once more.’

It seemed vain, also, to ask Porlock again to reassert his influence over the young lord. Porlock saw that it

had practically ceased to exist, and he said as much to Lady Mompesson.

Horneck was snugly housed with his niece on the estate, and was going to be the most important factor in the development of the young lord's character. The boy's precise danger was that he was too delightful for every stranger he met. And his mother began to think that there was something so Bohemian and careless, so undignified, free-and-easy, and foolishly open-hearted in him, that he was hardly a Mompesson at all. Yet every night she prayed very earnestly for him, even mentioning, as all mothers do, the trivial things of his daily life, such as that in his hunting and riding he might be kept from danger. For beneath her apparent hardness and her formalism she had a heart that loved him. She believed, however, that he was being led off his feet, and when Harold told her that, instead of going back to Oxford, he intended to read history, mathematics and other things with Dr. Horneck, she asked Porlock to make a final effort to wrest the boy out of such hands.

But Porlock found great difficulty in doing the thing, or even in attempting to do it. He never could reach the boy now. He was always sure to be walking or riding with the doctor. Porlock felt sure that the dreadful man would be corrupting the boy's mind with modern scepticism. The fact that Horneck never came to church was sufficient proof that he was not the sort of companion Harold should have chosen. For all that the Vicar and Lady Mompesson knew, he might be pouring into him the latest heterodox views, the denial of miracles, the so-called dual authorship of Isaiah, and other blasphemies. Horneck's years, his intellectual power, which Porlock suspected and feared, the man's

huge English disdain for opinions which he conceived to be inferior to his own, also his great strength of body, almost Herculean—all this, together, with a certain ghastly fascination of eyes and smile under which Porlock himself had come, would be sure, he thought, to impress the impressionable boy.' And not merely Harold, but the whole district would suffer from the ascendancy of such a man, for Harold might be tempted to alter half the customs of his ancestors according to the whim of a freethinking doctor.

Even as it was, Horneck had begun to practise in Eight Bells, and had cured the innkeeper of a quinsy, and there was a report that he was about to operate for cataract on an old woman. He was being well spoken of in the district. In these things Porlock, who had a noble soul in him, might have rejoiced, especially when he got to know that Horneck had attended the bedsides of some poor people without asking a fee. But, being Harold's old tutor, he resented the doctor's intrusion at North Bayton. When once Lady Mompesson proposed that Porlock should come to dinner, Harold said he would run down and fetch Horneck also. But his mother then said that she would never think of having Porlock. Harold was beginning to chafe. After all, he was master now, and could invite to his table whom he pleased. It was not even necessary for his mother to live at North Bayton. She had been provided for otherwise under the will. It was hardly even her privilege now to order him to Oxford, or anywhere else. And, indeed, she began to see dimly some peril of alienation in the distance. Her authority over him would be all too brief at the best. Was it wise to make it briefer by thwarting him in the small affairs of his own friendships, likes and dislikes?

Porlock strongly advised her to move very gently. The ire and haughty temper of the Mompessons was in the boy's veins, and deny it how they could, he was master of himself and of his lands. Let her take care, therefore, not to rouse him. 'The true peril,' thought Porlock, 'will be his marriage, when it comes. *That* may shock her, for the marriage of a headstrong boy has never yet failed to shock the trembling parents.' Meantime she should rather be thankful that he was as 'good' as he was.

Thus, although it was rather painful for Porlock to ride to hounds in company with Horneck, since he seemed to have ousted him from his old place at Harold's side, yet he had too much natural pride and dignity to show resentment. And when, having once asked Harold what Horneck was doing for him, Harold had replied that he was the cleverest man he had ever met, Porlock said he had no doubt about it, and that he hoped the young lord was making progress in his studies.

The truth was, however, that Horneck, who was, perhaps, too outspoken, was steadily, although quite unconsciously, damaging the foundations of belief which Porlock had so carefully laid long ago in the young lord's mind. In fact, one day, while Horneck and the boy were walking beyond Eight Bells on the road to Eastdown, enjoying the breath of spring already in the air, and noticing that the trees were stretching their cramped limbs after the rigorous winter's cold, they got into a very earnest conversation. It had been suggested by a sower who was busy scattering grain on one of Dicky Nye's fields.

Horneck said that such a sight always reminded him of the Parable of the Sower in the New Testament,

which was a strange parable, full of contradictions and confused thinking. Harold, a little startled, asked him what he meant, because that parable had been especially dear to him as a child. His mother used often to read it to him, and take him out to the fields to see it being acted, as it were. He had understood it clearly, since he had been familiar from the earliest with agricultural scenes.

'But, look you,' said Horneck, 'that parable is a piece of very loose and inaccurate thinking. The fact is, Huxley went the wrong way about. He shouldn't have troubled about the dates of the Gospels at all. His criticism was too external, in fact. He ought to have undermined the thing from the inside, and shown the incoherence and meaninglessness of many of those renowned sayings. For instance, let us take that parable of the Sower. The Sower goes out to sow, just like that man over there. Very well, then. Some seeds fall by the wayside, and the birds come and devour them up. Some fall on stony places, where they have no earth, and wither away as soon as the sun is up. Some fall among thorns and are choked. The rest fall into good ground, as good as the middle of that field there. Yes, yes, all right. But seeds can grow only where they are let fall, and it is difficult to see what control the crop can have over the Sower's hand. This parable contains problems it makes no attempt to solve. The truth underlying it is, that, for good or for evil, each individual is in the hands of a destiny beyond his reach—destiny, or God, or whatever you will, like a great sower scattering millions of grains over the world. I assure you, my dear boy, that Jesus never believed in freewill if He really understood this parable of His. Well,

then, you see, He is only content with the fact that some of the seeds have the good fortune to be let fall in the right place. He congratulates all the successes, and passes judgment on the rest of the blighted vegetation which follows in the Sower's wake. But whose is the fault? The Sower's, of course. There was never a more vivid picture of the naturalistic view of the world.'

Harold listened, and it all came to him like an uneasy revelation. At first he felt a shock of antagonism against the doctor, because it seemed to him as if his soul and all its old beliefs were being rooted up. He said to Horneck that he had never thought of it before. Porlock had never even hinted such a method of examining the materials of faith. But if one parable could be thus turned upside down, it augured ill for the others. Was the whole structure of belief to totter to the ground?

'Precisely,' said Horneck; 'take the Parable of the Tares, in which the Son of Man sows the good seed, and the devil the tares. This is an admirable statement of fatalism, but it is misused by its own Author. If you are a tare, and if soil is provided for your roots, what can you do but grow? The question of choice is never even considered. You are *planted*, and you have got to grow!'

It was by conversations like these that Horneck began to exercise a great, if destructive, influence on the boy's mind. Lady Mompesson was a strict Churchwoman, and Harold had been very religiously brought up. But Horneck seemed to tumble religion out of his mind. I think Horneck made a mistake. Harold was not yet ready for the nightmares of unbelief. But in acting thus Horneck had really no sinister motive. It was the man's

habit to think aloud in this way, unconscious of his audience. Well, then, on their way back, as they were passing the Vicarage, Harold blushed as he saw Porlock in the garden.

Eight Bells consists of one long narrow street, such that a cannon-ball might be fired from one end of the village to the other. The church and Vicarage are at the west end, or the end nearer North Bayton, and after the church, the next largest building is the shed in which the corn-market is held every Thursday—the only day, therefore, when there is a stir in the village.

It happened to be a Thursday when Harold and Horneck were walking through. Dicky Nye, the great burly farmer, and Charley, his burly son, together with a group of the lesser notabilities of Eight Bells, were standing at the door of the Corn Exchange, and all hats were raised as the young lord passed. They turned to look at him, and everyone agreed that he had grown into a fine youth. He would never be as tall as Horneck, but he was well set up.

Jealousy of the doctor, however, had already begun to make itself felt among those who were continually looking for favours from North Bayton, and were always on the watch for those on whom they were bestowed. Some even maintained that Horneck was sitting rent-free in his cottage, and shook their heads over him, as if he were the evil genius of the young lord. Horneck's medical services, which had already been freely given more than once, did not stop the mouths of envious gossip, and all sorts of speculations were abroad as to him and his blind niece. It began to be asked, too, why Horneck had settled himself down so hastily beside

Nicolay, the odd husband of Millicent, who was now never to be seen in Eight Bells.

Porlock was questioned, but he said he knew nothing about Dr. Horneck's predilections. He was, in truth, more concerned with the fact that Horneck had settled himself down beside Lord Mompesson. When he saw them both coming along the road, he tried to quench the slight feeling of jealousy which arose within him at the stranger's monopolization of the boy whom he had known from his birth, whom he had fondled as a child, whom later he had tutored, and had always loved. Many were the walks Harold and he had taken together, but those days seemed over. Mysteriously enough, Porlock felt a tear trickle down his cheek, and had only time to brush it away before Harold and the doctor came up.

Harold was blushing, but he waved his stick to the Vicar, and called him to come down from the lawn. Porlock came, lifting his hat as he drew nearer. He had been superintending his gardener at work among the spring beds, and his own hands were red and brown with the earth. Harold seized them, notwithstanding, while Porlock greeted Horneck with a nod, and then, after Harold had let him free, shook hands, excusing himself, with the doctor, who was gloved.

'What's the news, Vicar? How are the girls and Mrs. Porlock?' asked Harold.

'Very well, thank you, your lordship. Won't your lordship come in?' said Porlock, and then looked at Horneck, meaning to extend the welcome to him also.

But Horneck was gazing at the church, and had his eyes fixed on the spire.

Harold accepted the invitation for Horneck and himself, and they went through the gate, and walked across

the garden with the Vicar. Horneck, still looking at the church and the gravestones on the other side of the bare blackberry hedge, was silent as he walked, and it was not until they were at the Vicarage door that he said Porlock had a very pleasant though solemn abode. Then they went in, and found Mrs. Porlock and the girls making children's clothes as presents for the poor of Eight Bells at Easter.

Harold asked Muriel and Marjorie why they had not been at the hunt lately, while Horneck engaged in conversation with Mrs. Porlock, Porlock himself listening. Mrs. Porlock's rheumatism was causing her great pain that day, and she could hardly help mentioning it to a stranger. Horneck had noticed her fingers bandaged up with rolls of flannel.

'You must find it very painful to sew these things,' he said; 'I think you should stop.'

'But we have so many to make before Easter,' she said. 'I must get on with them. I haven't begun the boys' things yet.'

Horneck asked her if he might see her hands, and she readily consented. He saw she was suffering from rheumatic enlargement of the bones.

'You have most pain at night, have you not?' he asked.

'Yes, it is perfectly dreadful at night!' she said.

'Perhaps the doctor could do something,' said Porlock, more anxious at the moment about his wife's recovery than about the theological opinions of Dr. Horneck.

'You have come to be our new doctor, I hear,' said Mrs. Porlock.

'Oh well, not exactly,' Horneck replied; 'but I shall do what I can among you. I shall go wherever I am called.'

'Well, then, can you do anything for a poor rheumatic? This is a dreadful place for rheumatism,' said the suffering woman.

Horneck asked her if she had ever been treated with tincture of iodine, and when she said no, he was surprised.

'May I?' he asked, as he rose and went to Porlock's desk, evidently for the purpose of writing a prescription.

'Certainly,' said Porlock, preparing the ink and paper for him.

The two girls and Harold were sitting at the fireplace, and stopped talking to look at Horneck's great head bending over the desk, where the light from the window fell on the clusters of his dark hair. And then Harold whispered to them :

'Isn't he a wonderful-looking man ?'

Muriel whispered back that she thought Horneck very ugly ; but Marjorie said, 'No, not a bit.'

'Who is he?' whispered Marjorie ; 'we've heard so much about him. Hasn't he a blind niece ?'

Harold nodded, but their whispers were cut short by a question of Mrs. Porlock to Harold about his mother. Horneck was giving Porlock instructions as to how the tincture should be used, and the Vicar, much touched by his kindness, put the prescription in a drawer of his desk. Porlock was too generous a parson to keep from praising even a man about whom he had doubts. So he began :

'I hear you have done some very charitable work, sir. You have been attending, and even sitting up long nights with, Widow Blades. Her son was blessing your name to me to-day.'

'Oh, that was a trifle,' said Horneck, smiling, while

Harold was quite pleased that the Vicar and Horneck seemed to be getting on well with each other.

'I am afraid, doctor,' continued Porlock, 'that they can give you but scanty payment, but I am sure their gratitude will be thoroughly sincere.'

'I ask nothing better,' said Horneck. 'You must know that I have never really made a living by my profession. It was by an accident that I took it up. My father was Sir Ralph Horneck, well known as an authority on the breeding of cattle, and used to be called the Breeding Baronet.'

'Oh, indeed! oh, indeed!' exclaimed Porlock, evidently surprised.

'Well, Doctor, shall we be going?' said Harold.

After they left, Mrs. Porlock said that the doctor was a thoroughly delightful man, and that she felt convinced he was going to cure her. Porlock agreed that they could learn charity even from those outside the fold, but said it was a pity that a man with such brains, no doubt the most remarkable person in the district, never came to church. It was to be hoped, he added, that his influence on Lord Momesson would be a good, and not a bad one. Muriel and Marjorie then said that Harold had asked them why they had not been at the hunt, but that they had been ashamed to say that it was because the Vicar couldn't afford horses.

'He might have offered us one each,' said Muriel.

'I am sure you had just to ask it from him,' said Mrs. Porlock.

Meanwhile Harold and the doctor were on their way to North Baytop. Harold asked him how he was liking his cottage, and if everything was comfortable. Horneck said yes, indeed, he was liking it very much, and

that already the wonderful air of Sussex had improved Harriet's health. Harold then began to question him about Nicolay, and said he was rather an odd lot.

'I don't suppose you knew him before you came here, doctor?' he asked. 'Rewbell recommended him to me as a tenant.'

'Oh yes,' said Horneck. 'Oh, certainly. He is my son-in-law.'

'Your son-in-law!' exclaimed Harold. 'But Millicent is old Heath's—'

'Oh yes,' said Horneck, 'but he married my dear El—'

Here the doctor burst into tears, while Harold looked at him in astonishment.

'Ah, I am sorry. Excuse me, my lord,' said Horneck. Harold said he was extremely sorry indeed.

'It's a recent blow,' said Horneck—'an open wound!'

Harold then said that he knew that Nicolay was a friend of Edwin Rewbell, his own manager.

'A friend?' asked Horneck.

'Well, I mean related in some way.'

'Yes, connected by marriage, I think,' said Horneck.

'Did you know Edwin before you came here, doctor?'

'I met him once, I think. When was it? It was the very day my dear child was taken from me for ever.'

The doctor then threw out his hands helplessly, and shook himself in violent emotion. As he stood in the middle of the road, he offered a strange spectacle to Harold. As soon as he had come to himself, however, the young lord at once changed the subject. They were now in sight of the cottages.

'My father, you know,' said Harold, 'took pity at last on the old bankrupt miller, and left him a cottage by

special codicil just before he died. It must have been only a few hours before, because his signature is quite shaky. If Teddy Wharton behaves well, and succeeds in turning out some good horses for me, I mean him to get that cottage after old Heath's death. Heath is his uncle, you know, and he is Millicent's cousin.'

'Yes, I remember,' said Horneck. 'I remember your father, on his death-bed, shouting out that old Heath was to have a cottage as well.'

'Were *you* at my father's death-bed?' asked Harold in astonishment.

'Oh, ye—es,' replied Horneck, suddenly aware that he had made a mistake.

'I never heard of it. Edwin said another doctor was there, Dr. Meiklam, who has since died.'

'Ah, yes,' said Horneck. 'Meiklam had been there, no doubt, before he himself turned ill, but I happened to be in Eight Bells just at the very end, although I remember another doctor did come the very day your father died.'

'How interesting! It is strange Edwin has said nothing about it. And have they never paid you, doctor?'

'It is enough payment, my lord, to be your lordship's tenant,' said Horneck, pointing to his own cottage.

As they reached the gate, they saw Nicolay running into his house like a rat into a hole. Horneck, with his finger on the spring of the gate, looked curiously at the disappearing man, and Harold was astonished to see the doctor's eyes blazing. He turned again to see if Nicolay was there, but he had fled in.

Harold then said to Horneck :

'I should just like to see how the cottages look when they are furnished, doctor. May I come in?'

'If your lordship will honour us,' said Horneck, 'we shall indeed be very pleased.'

They went in. Harriet had heard her uncle's voice, and was groping to the door to open it for him. Before they came down the little walk, she had opened the door and was standing on the threshold with the spring sunshine full upon her. She was crying :

'Ah, I see you, uncle. No, I see *two* coming to me in the sun !'

Horneck's cottage was two stories high, and contained in all seven apartments. Two little sitting-rooms, one on each side of the door, had oriel windows with sides and sashes painted white. The front-door was painted green and had a brass knocker. Horneck's bedroom, which was on the second flat, had two windows, one to the front, and the other facing the gable of Nicolay's cottage. Harriet's bedroom was on the other side, with a window to the front, and another facing old Heath's gable. Indeed, the three cottages had been built on the same plan, and presented the same appearance. Before them lay the undigged expanse of downs, and behind them the trees which hid North Bayton and sheltered it from the sea-storms.

From the little gardens the sea could be seen gleaming southward, and nothing separated it from the cottages except the cliffs and the downs. About a hundred yards distant was the principal entrance to the castle, and the road which led to it led also eastwards to Seadown, and westwards to Eight Bells.

In summer, when the wind was high, the dust used to beat against the windows like a sand-storm. It was on the whole a lonely road, except for now and again a carrier's cart or the old omnibus running between Sea-

down, Eight Bells, and Eastdown, or a shepherd driving his flock to new pasture, or her ladyship's carriage as it passed towards Eight Bells.

Horneck called his little house Twilight Cottage, at the suggestion of Harriet, whose whole life was in twilight. He had furnished it with Harriet's mother's furniture, which had been left for the purpose, but which proved itself to be at least three times too much, so that the unused remainder was sent back to London to be sold. Besides Harriet's companion, one servant was found sufficient. At last Horneck had a little room of his own, where he could arrange the books which had been his life-long friends, and where he could smoke and think undisturbed as long as he pleased. He was content, also, with the progress Harriet was making. She seemed to thrive in Sussex air. Now and again he used to be seen walking with her, and Harriet was so strong and so good a walker that they often went as far as Eight Bells to make a few purchases.

At first the doctor was afraid to allow her out alone on the downs, in case she might go too near the cliffs, whose white heads, a mile and a half away, could be seen from the windows. Indeed, anyone running that distance in a straight line from Twilight Cottage would go sheer over them to his destruction. Harriet, however, began to know by the varying noise of the sea, according as she approached or receded, how to avoid danger, and Horneck allowed her to roam over the downs as often as she pleased on those clear spring days.

Everyone who had seen her at Eight Bells had been struck by her extraordinary beauty, and few could believe she was blind. For it was not merely that her eyes were open and full of expression. She moved

with grace, as if perfectly sure of every step, although, of course, now and again a certain hesitating movement betrayed the timidity of the blind. But her tall form, her dark hair, and her very regular features were remarked by almost everyone in the village, and when Horneck brought her to Eight Bells on an afternoon, he used to hear admiring comments by passers-by. Never, indeed, had beauty been so sorely handicapped.

The first time Muriel and Marjorie Porlock saw her they could not resist turning round to look at her after she had passed. The next time they met her was after Horneck had been at the Vicarage, and they stopped him and asked if this was his niece. Horneck introduced her, and they said they hoped she would come to see them.

'These are the Vicar's daughters, Harriet,' said Horneck. 'They are inviting you to the Vicarage.'

The blind girl smiled and thanked them, and said she would come. Indeed, Harriet drew forth the compassion of everyone who saw her. To be so beautiful and so blind seemed an extraordinary fate. But perhaps no one felt such pity for her as Harold. It is no exaggeration to say that when he saw her that morning, standing on the threshold of the little cottage in the sun, he thought that the world could contain no lovelier creature.

Standing there magnificent and helpless in the doorway, she looked like some Grecian goddess stricken blind. Harold had a good deal of submerged chivalry in his nature that had never yet had an opportunity of being called forth. And he felt a new sensation, mingled of compassion and awe, as he looked at the superb helpless girl. Involuntarily he stopped in the gravelled

pathway to look at her. Horneck glanced at him, and said :

'Yes, that's she. Most people are surprised when they see her first.'

Then they went forward, and Horneck introduced him, calling back Harriet, who, conscious that there was a stranger present, was withdrawing.

'Harriet,' said Horneck, 'this is Lord Mompesson.'

'I am glad to see you,' said Harold.

'I'm sorry I cannot see *you*, my lord,' replied Harriet, smiling.

Then they went in, but Harold forgot that he had come to see the cottage. He could have sat talking a long time to the blind girl. He asked her how she was liking Sussex, and said he was sorry she could not enjoy the sight of the country round about. She said yes, indeed, that her uncle had told her that it was a beautiful place, and that his lordship possessed a splendid inheritance. But she could only see glimmerings and shadows of it.

'You must come to see my mother,' said Harold. 'She is very interested in the blind. Indeed, she is president of an institution for blind women in London, and invites them here every spring. I hope you will come.'

Harriet thanked his lordship, but when Horneck took him over the house the boy was anxious to go back to the little sitting-room where they had left Harriet. And he did go into the parlour again to ask her if there was anything special which she needed.

'Nothing, my lord,' she said, 'except eyes to *see* you!'

She had been touched by the peculiar tenderness of his voice.

'Do you like flowers?' he asked.

'Yes, your lordship, I love them.'

'Then you shall have some,' he said.

Horneck stood watching the boy, and thought him thoroughly charming. Then they said good-bye, and Harold walked back to North Bayton with something like tears in his eyes as he murmured, 'That dear girl!'

'Mother,' he said, as soon as he arrived at the castle, 'I've seen the doctor's niece. She's almost totally blind. And she's so beautiful! You'll be interested in her. Do have her up. She reminds me of one of the blind girls you had here last spring.'

His mother was silent. He had never seen her look quite so stern.

'Mother!' he said, 'do you mean to say that just because that girl is the niece of Dr. Horneck you will have nothing to do with her—you who are mixed up in a charity for the blind? I call it shocking. I call it damned hypocrisy and cant! That's what I do!'

'Harold, Harold!' she exclaimed, 'what are things coming to when you can talk to me in such a way?'

'Talk to you in such a way!' he repeated mockingly. 'Don't you deserve it? Isn't Dr. Horneck right when he describes all your Christianity as honeycombed with snobbism and pharisaism? A cruel Christian is the worst devil in the world.'

'Harold, do you call me cruel—your mother cruel?'

'Of course,' he said hoarsely. 'You hate Dr. Horneck—you who taught me to love my enemies, to do good even to those who despitefully use you. O God, the cant of it! She is blind, but because Horneck is her uncle and my friend she is not to be'

received among the other blind people who will come here. Mother, I am ashamed of you—utterly !'

' Harold,' said his mother, ' if I refuse to receive Dr. Horneck's blind niece, it is not, certainly, because I hate her or him, but because I do not wish to encourage a man who has lost me my son ! You will repent what you have said, Harold !'

Lady Mompesson then broke down in tears. It was on Harold's hot lips to say that it was not necessary for his mother to continue living at North Bayton at all, but he withheld these frightful words of expulsion, and hurriedly left the room. Before he went, however, she had seen the fury of his looks, his defiance, his scorn, her own son's contempt. And she felt that at that moment he had leapt into arrogant manhood. Days passed without a word spoken between them. Her pride and his sealed their lips.

Wharton brought round the roan, and he went riding for hours over the wide downs, returning late at night, while his mother sat listening hours in agony for the sound of his horse's hoofs on the avenue. He kept brooding on Harriet. Horneck had taught him to *think*, but thus far had only made him conscious of a hundred disillusionments. Woe indeed to the man who begins to analyze his pleasures ! And that was what Horneck had taught him to do. A certain change had come over the gay boy. Wharton deplored that he was taking now so little interest in his horses. An occasional ride seemed to satisfy him. The time was past when he would wish to sit up a whole night with a sick horse. His enthusiasm had cooled, and Wharton went grumbling about the stables. Everyone blamed Horneck for the change that had taken place.

And, indeed, if the young lord was ever long absent from North Bayton, it always turned out that he had been at Twilight Cottage.

Now, a few weeks previously Harold had arranged that the doctor should come up to North Bayton every forenoon to give him lessons in various subjects. Horneck's multifarious knowledge had impressed the young lord, who gladly listened to his theories. Almost daily, therefore, Lady Mompesson used to see Horneck coming up the long avenue, stopping now and again to lean on his stick and look at the trees and the flower-beds and the lawn. What especially delighted him at North Bayton was the profusion of rhododendrons. On both sides of the avenue there were tall bushes of that exquisite flower, and the late lord had even imported some of the finest Himalayan specimens, which were now lighting up and glorifying the North Bayton grounds.

As soon as Harold heard that Horneck admired them so much, he ordered some to be transplanted into the little garden at Twilight Cottage; and one morning it gave the doctor a surprise to see these charming bushes flourishing opposite his windows. When, however, Lady Mompesson used to see the huge man stalking up to the castle, it may be easily understood how his presence made her almost terrified. For she knew that he was a destroying influence, that he was robbing her of her boy, and filling his head with the folly and arrogance of disbelief. Ah, how the days seemed at an enormous distance when the curly-headed child had come to her knee, and had repeated in the lisping and pathetic utterance of childhood some nursery rhyme of childhood's faith!

' I think when I read the sweet story of old,  
When Jesus was here among men,  
How He gathered the children like lambs to His fold  
I would like to have been with Him then !'

No, no ! Those days were gone for ever. The ruthless doctor was unconsciously effacing their memory and breaking a woman's heart. It does seem true, does it not ? that if heaven lies about us in our infancy, hell lies about us in our youth. The huge dark man, as he came stalking through the flower-gardens, seemed a kind of Mephistopheles searching like a wind of death for young souls and young roses. Well, then, he used to spend two hours with his pupil, touching on God, sending the shafts of his wit into history, politics, literature. What was Christianity, for instance, as made use of by the Church, but a huge system of blackmail on the human race ? Could anyone deny it who had really understood the history of the Church ? It had been perpetually blackmailing the human race, terrorizing it into belief, had it not ? No, no ! The mystery is not why we are all so bad, but why we are all so good. The mystery is that, given our origin, which is close down among dark roots of sinister non-moral things, we should have created any system of morals or idealism at all. And, then, what is your Protestantism but a kind of theological mathematics, of a most bewildering and blundering kind ? How on earth could an equation ever be made of an omnipotent, omniscient Trinity on the one side, and one little ignorant and trembling, crushed soul on the other ? Why, it is all laborious nonsense. And sin—well, if the foul river of it has been flowing for generations undammed, unstopped, can we who are in the lower reaches thrust back the volume of it ?

'My dear boy,' said the doctor, 'there is no hilarity so great as the hilarity of the thinker.' And then he presented Harold with Feuerbach's 'Essence of Christianity,' which he said had been translated by that admirable woman George Eliot. It was no wonder, therefore, if the young lord, after he had listened to Horneck's vigorous scepticism and had read the book of the great German sceptic, ceased to go to church. In fact, the Sunday after Horneck and he had taken their walk in the fields it so happened that Porlock was preaching on the Parable of the Sower. Harold was present, and listened very attentively, because Horneck's views on the subject were still fresh in his mind. Porlock, however, treated the parable in the commonplace orthodox manner, and the sermon and the service appeared to the young lord preposterously meaningless. As the congregation came out, Harold and his mother were respectfully saluted by the crowd of villagers, who fell back to make room for them. But no one knew the conflict taking place in the young lord's mind.

It was only when they had driven back to North Bayton that he told his mother that that was the last time he meant to go to church. It never even occurred to him that, as the chief person in the district, he would be expected to obey its conventions. His mother's tears, exhortations, and her bitter exclamation when she asked if her son was an infidel, availed nothing. He said it was better to be an infidel than a hypocrite, and that he would not wear a mask. She felt that all her misgivings had come true. It was the greatest shock she had received since her husband's death.

'That bad, bad man!' she kept exclaiming, in reference to the doctor.

Harold assured her, however, that Porlock was quite out of date, and, now that he remembered it, even Oxford was full of Horneck's opinions.

'Do you suppose,' he asked, 'that any man who holds a chair of science or of philosophy believes these fables?'

She mentioned the recent case of Romanes—how that after wandering in unbelief he had come back to the fold and had died a Christian—he who had been a friend of Darwin and a most brilliant man of science.

Harold shrugged his shoulders. Doubtless Dr. Horneck could explain such lapses and counter-lapses.

'I tell you what it is, Harold,' she said, almost in tones of anger: 'that man has brought about your intellectual corruption. He will bring about your moral corruption as well. The one is the prelude to the other.'

That night Harold found on the table in his bedroom Romanes' 'Thoughts on Religion,' but after glancing at it, he laid it down. A thorough revolution had taken place within him. If he was going to do any reading at all, it would be in Feuerbach's 'Essence of Christianity.' At any rate, his mother had to go to church alone. Sunday after Sunday she sat alone in the wide pew, until his lordship's absence began to be remarked. It was whispered that he was now an atheist, and that Horneck had done it.

When Harold met Muriel and Marjorie they glanced at him curiously. In fact, the one topic of discussion at Eight Bells was his lordship's atheism. Nicolay, stealing along at nights to the inn, heard it discussed in the tavern, and whenever Horneck's name was mentioned with opprobrium vigorously joined in the denunciation. He said they should hound him out of the

district. At least, sick people should never allow such a man to come to their bedsides.

Meantime, also, Porlock had noticed the young lord's absence from church, and had guessed the cause. He felt pleased with his own foresight, for had he not warned Horneck never to tamper with the young lord's soul? To be sure, Horneck's tampering with Mrs. Porlock's rheumatism had already brought relief. She was very, very much better, and the little woollen bands in which her fingers had been swaddled were now taken off. Mrs. Porlock persisted in thinking that Horneck was a thoroughly delightful man. It was only a pity that his theology was not as sound as his therapeutics.

Lady Mompesson made one last appeal to Porlock. Let him come at once and have a serious talk with her son, or else defy the stranger himself in his own iniquitous den. For Lady Mompesson could never pass Twilight Cottage without feeling that it contained something essentially nefarious. If the doctor's niece was blind, it was doubtless a punishment for his unbelief. At an hour arranged with her ladyship, Porlock, therefore, called at North Bayton on his mission to the young apostate. A final effort was to be made to pluck a brand from the burning. But in the course of this world's history very few brands indeed have been plucked from the burning. What are brands meant for but to be burned?

Porlock knew that it was a dangerous experiment, and he was not surprised when Lord Mompesson, turning suddenly haughty for the first time, gave him a haughty Mompesson glance, as if to warn him to mind his own affairs.

'I am aware, your lordship,' said Porlock, stung, 'that

I have no right whatever, absolutely none, to attempt to resist the development of your lordship's opinions. Still, as your lordship's old tutor, as one who loved your lordship'—and here Porlock faltered and Harold felt miserable—‘ and for the sake of your dear mother, the Countess, for the sake of us all, I would ask you to consider whither this stranger is leading you. It has already got abroad that your lordship has become hostile to the Church, and the younger and lighter youths of the village are beginning to stay away, and when reproved, mention your lordship's name as an excuse. I thought it my duty as Vicar to inform your lordship of this painful fact.’

Porlock's voice was breaking as he finished, but Harold's was also breaking when he began to reply to his old tutor, and said hotly that he would defend Dr. Horneck against any of them. And then he launched into bitter invective against his mother and the hypocrisy and cant of a Christianity which prevented the president of a Blind Society taking pity on a blind girl because her uncle happened to be a sceptic. It was clear that it was this which was rankling in the boy's mind. Besides, whose business was it, he asked, if he had changed his opinions? He flung back the Vicar's insinuations against Dr. Horneck's character, and told him to obey his creed and think no evil of anyone. As for his mother, who stood weeping by his side, he said he did not molest her on account of her opinions, and therefore she should not molest him on account of his.

‘ But, you're not to go away thinking I'm now your enemy, Vicar. Not a bit! You know that could never be. You are my friend just as usual, as well as Dr. Horneck,’ said Harold, smiling at his old tutor.

It seemed useless to proceed further. To begin to argue would be absurd. And so the saddened Vicar prepared to take his leave, not, however, without injunctions from the Countess to pray for her son. Before he left, he whispered to her that at least she need have no fear of the boy's moral character. The sins of the intellect, he said, were dangerous indeed, but they were, after all, never so terrible as the sins of the heart. Harold, he felt persuaded, had a noble character, and doubtless he would abjure those noxious opinions when his judgment matured.

Lady Mompesson shook her head sorrowfully, but Porlock again assured her, and in order to help matters he decided to call on Horneck on his way back to Eight Bells. In the friendliest manner he would tell the terrible doctor the effects which his teaching had already spread abroad, and ask him in the name of the Countess to discontinue his friendship with Lord Mompesson. Porlock loved Harold too much, and felt the seriousness of the situation too keenly, not to be willing to undertake such a delicate and thankless task. The doctor might despise him as he pleased ; it mattered nothing. He would be doing his duty.

Horneck happened to be at home that afternoon, and as Porlock stood waiting in the little room, he looked at the doctor's books, many of which were unfamiliar to him. But he recognised the names of numerous free-thinkers, and among other books saw Büchner's 'Kraft und Stoff,' Lasson's Eckhart, Strauss' 'Leben Jesu,' Berti's 'Bruno,' Mackintosh's 'Natural History of the Christian Religion,' 'Menschlich alles zu Menschlich,' Lange's 'History of Materialism,' 'Jude the Obscure,'

'*Les Contes Drolatiques*,' and many other injurious books. These doubtless were the stores out of which the doctor drew the virus of unbelief from which Harold was now suffering.

Porlock looked at them placidly as so many heaped, weary arguments to be forgotten next century. He had come, not to argue, but to make a human appeal. At length he heard Horneck's heavy step descending the stair, and presently the doctor came in and shook the Vicar's hand, and asked him to be seated. Porlock lost no time in acquainting the doctor with the reason of his visit, and he was a little surprised to see that Horneck apparently was not resenting it.

'No, no!' said Horneck, smiling on him; 'you are not to suppose I am such a terrible person, fit to upset a whole district, Mr. Porlock. I am as much interested in belief as in unbelief: I am really interested in the theory which made God a Jew. It is excellent. The distribution of happiness in this world does actually suggest Jewish thrift.'

Porlock determined not to be discomfited by this subtle raillery. He could not help, however, being slightly disconcerted by Horneck's eyes, which were glittering and fastened on him. Horneck's eyes, like Mr. Gladstone's, almost compelled submission, for, like his, they were eagle-like, and almost voracious. Porlock was stunned by their penetrating light, but said that he had not come to discuss those questions with the doctor, and that he did not pretend to be as learned or as satirical. No, he had come for the sake of Lady Mompesson, who had been terribly disturbed by the news that the doctor had succeeded in making the young lord an atheist.

' My dear man,' said Horneck, ' that is a foolish and meaningless word. There never was an atheist, for atheism is the negation of a positive whose content we don't know, and therefore has no meaning.'

Porlock then said that he did not pretend to understand the doctor, but he pretended to understand the sorrow and agony of a mother's heart.

' I do not grudge you,' said Porlock, ' the friendship of ——of my old pupil. You are able to give him far more instruction than I ever could, but——'

' Indeed I must congratulate you on what you have done for him,' said Horneck. ' The boy knows his Horace ; he knows his Tacitus, too. On the whole, you have given him, sir, a sound training.'

Porlock thanked the baffling man for his praise, but proceeded to urge his own complaint.

' You see,' he said, ' it has got abroad that he is an atheist. He never comes to church. It is a bad example for the youths of the district. He is so young, Dr. Horneck ; we tremble for his future. Harold is passionate and headstrong. When you are no longer here to guide him, will he be able to stand alone ? Think of his temptations ; think of the great position he has to fill. And how can he fill it if his mind is unbalanced ?

' You think the boy will go wrong, like his father, do you ? You think he's going to be a heretic in morals, too ? '

' Precisely,' said Porlock, ' and it will be all the easier since you have destroyed his belief in God.'

' Have I indeed !' exclaimed Horneck. ' Rather, I am building him up in that belief. You remember the excellent lines of that great man Blake :

“The vision of Christ that thou dost see  
Is my vision's greatest enemy.”

And again :

“Thy heaven doors are my hell gates.”

‘A great change has come over him,’ said Porlock.

‘Yes, and all the better. He’s beginning to *think*. My dear Vicar, the Church is *not* Christianity. But you flatter too much when you suppose that my influence over him is so great.’

‘Your influence on him is enormous,’ said Porlock.

‘You have ousted us all, Dr. Horneck. He would do anything you told him. He, lord as he is, would be your slave, sir.’

‘Nonsense!’ maintained the doctor; ‘he’s only a very open-hearted boy who needs sympathy. He asked me to become his friend; I became it. When he questioned me on my opinions, could I tell lies? I have no fear of Lord Mompesson. Tell his mother she should rather be proud of such a full-hearted, generous boy.’

It seemed useless to argue with the doctor, and Porlock felt rather bitter against him just at that moment.

‘How is Mrs. Porlock?’ asked Horneck.

‘Her rheumatism is very much better,’ said Porlock, bewildered by the man’s tact—‘thanks to *you*, sir, I must say.’

Horneck said he was very pleased, and Porlock left for the Vicarage, feeling that Dr. Horneck was the most dangerous man he had ever met. When his wife asked him how he had got on, he shook his head, saying that Harold was now wholly in the hands of the unbelieving doctor.

The truth was, however, that another force besides

Horneck's had entered Lord Mompesson's life. Ever since he had seen Harriet he had been thinking about her. He could not sleep for thinking about her. The strange combination of beauty and blindness aroused his wonder and excited his imagination. If a man really loved a blind girl, he thought his possession of her would be thorough, absolute, undisputed! He remembered that Dr. Horneck had told him that Harriet had once been in love. How strange! He wondered with whom she had been in love, but a certain feeling of shame prevented him questioning the doctor. He brooded on the possibility of her being in love again. No, no! He could not sleep. One image, and one only, he saw wherever he went. He had sent her flowers, and she had returned thanks through Dr. Horneck. The first question which the young lord felt tempted to ask the doctor every morning was, How is Harriet? His difficulty was that, although he was burning to see her again, he hardly ventured to betray himself. She was so near and so far! She was the loveliest creature he had seen, and the most helpless. His mother's refusal to invite her to North Bayton had filled him with bitterness and indignation. He became very restless. He must see Harriet, do you hear? Pity, reverence, awe were all mixed up with young love in the glorious confusion of his soul. He rode, he galloped, hoping to see her on the downs. Nay, sometimes he imagined he saw her far off, moving like an elusive figure among the light morning mists, and he spurred his roan; but as he spurred the figure vanished. His bed at night was hot as he lay thinking of the sightless child at Twilight Cottage, and when he did sleep he went falling through great pits of bottomless dream in search of her. Was

this love? Oh! was this the torment of it? How the world had changed! He rose before the spring dawn, and saddled his horse, and rode over the twilight downs in sight of the cottage. Yes, that was her window. And *he* had built the cottage—a cottage foolishly unworthy of her. Would he ever rest till she and he were at North Bayton imparadised together? And as dawn came stealing up, glimmering on the edges of night, he rode away unsatisfied, disheartened, and yet with new shocks of joy. Suddenly all the craft of love came to his rescue. He told the doctor that he need not trouble to come up to North Bayton for the morning lessons.

'I shall come down to Twilight Cottage,' said Harold.

'Not at all!' exclaimed Horneck. 'I would never think of troubling your lordship in such a way.'

'Yes, I would prefer it—I really would,' said Harold. 'My horse will be brought to your door, and then I shall take my ride after we are done.'

Horneck consented, and said it was all the same to him. And so the young lord arrived every morning at Twilight Cottage, with hopes of seeing Harriet. He did see her, to be sure, but it was most unsatisfactory. How could he approach her? How could he tell her that, sightless or seeing, she was his? Horneck was always at his elbow. And, indeed, as they sat in the little room, Harold, while Horneck was discoursing to him on history or science, was listening for her footfalls about the house.

Certainly a new life had begun for the young Earl, and it centred round Twilight Cottage. He was sure to spend some time of the day in it. Even on a hunting

day he would pass the earlier part of the forenoon with the doctor. He used to come down in his hunting-suit, and after an hour or so Wharton brought the horses, and the Earl and the doctor, attended by Wharton, started for the hunt. The other magnates of the district had grown accustomed to Horneck, and when it became known that he came of an old Yorkshire Baronet's family he was well received. It was only the Vicar who began to frequent the hunt less often. The Earl's friendship for the doctor still excited curiosity, but it had every chance of becoming even closer. Baskets of flowers, baskets of fruit, presents of game, together with cheese and cream from the home farm, were sent down to the cottage. Horneck, however, sternly refused to accept any fee for his tuition, which he described as being both a pleasure and a profit to himself.

One day he was expounding the theory of Eckhart, whom he took to be one of the profoundest of European thinkers, one of the really few who knew anything about God and the human soul. The young lord, however, was hardly in a mood that day to theorize on the human soul. He was having too much personal experience of its mysteries, its disillusionments, its confused romance.

Harriet, in short, dressed in a pale-blue gown, had suddenly appeared in the little garden, and was finding her way round the rhododendron bush. While the doctor talked busily, Harold kept looking at her. Presently she went out of the gate, crossed the road, and began to walk over the downs in the direction of the cliffs and the sea. Harold started.

'Look,' he said; 'your niece is walking towards the cliffs!'

'She knows her way by this time,' said Horneck. 'She guides herself by the sound of the sea, and can even see its glimmer far away. She often goes and listens to it for hours.'

Harold settled himself again, and the doctor continued his reading. But as Harriet was disappearing, Harold asked again if there was really no danger.

'None whatever, your lordship,' said Horneck.

About ten minutes passed, and Harriet was wholly out of sight. Harold could remain seated no longer.

'I say, doctor,' he exclaimed, 'it's positively dangerous! I must go after your niece.'

He fled out of the room. Horneck, smiling at his impulsiveness, watched him run across the downs. When he lost sight of him, the doctor settled himself to his book again. He was soon plunged in Eckhart, and forgot Harold and Harriet.

Meantime Harold had almost overtaken her. It was a warm, delicious spring day, almost cheating the world into the belief that summer had actually come. The sky was blue, and the downs were green, and the sea was mixed of the colours of both. Behind, the towers of North Bayton were half disclosed through the spreading trees which surrounded it. Harriet was now about fifty feet ahead of Harold, who was running more swiftly than he had ever run before. The sea-air had guided Harriet straight ahead. She knew she was turning in the wrong direction whenever she felt the warm land-breeze blowing from rich ripening fields in the rear. Moreover, she had heard the cries of the sea-gulls poisoning over the cliffs, and now she heard the splashing sea. As she looked in its direction when the sun was on it, she seemed to see a flashing as of golden spears. She was

now within less than ten feet of the edge, and was hurrying nearer.

'Come back!' cried Harold, coming up behind her.

Traces of terror were in his eyes as he seized her and drew her back.

'Oh, my lord, is it you?' she exclaimed, with a start.

'Yes; I was afraid you would go over,' he said, smiling a smile which she could not see.

'No, your lordship; I can guide myself quite well. I know at once where danger begins,' she said, looking towards him and smiling back.

'Oh, never do it again—please, *never!*' said Harold.

'You are very kind. But do not be afraid, my lord.'

'Please, please, for my sake!' he said, and she knew by the tones of his voice that he was saying it very earnestly.

'Am I to be denied *everything?*' she asked. 'Am I not even to hear the sea? It cries here all day like some maddened thing, and I understand it.'

'I shall never be able to get the thought of your danger out of my head,' said the young Earl. 'I shall always be thinking of you tumbling over these dreadful cliffs.'

'It is very good of your lordship,' she said. 'Then, I promise.'

'I shall come to take you. I shall bring you here every morning if you wish,' he said, while his eyes were not yet clear of tears.

'Oh, never, my lord! You have far more important things to do. It would be infinite kindness even if you sent only a servant to do it. But your lordship's self!'

‘Oh, Harriet, Harriet, I love you—I love you !’ he wished to say.

‘Do you see nothing at all ?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’ she said ; ‘I see dim objects.’

‘How could you ever get back to the cottage then ?’ he asked.

‘By the telegraph - posts, which come across here almost in a straight line, don’t they ? They run to the coastguard station at Seadown, uncle tells me. Ah, I would be utterly happy if I could *see* !’

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘you would be surprised at many a thing. You would be surprised at your own beauty.’

‘Oh, my lord,’ she said, smiling, ‘the blind hardly ever receive such praises.’

‘Ah, but I mean it,’ said Harold, blushing, and thankful for the moment that she could not see.

‘I suppose the landscape round about is lovely. And the sea, *it* must be wonderful—quite dazzling, they say,’ she said as she turned seawards.

‘Yes, the foam is blazing at the foot of the cliffs this very moment,’ said Harold.

‘And the sun—oh, the sun !’ she exclaimed. ‘How I would love the light ! How amazing life must be for those who have eyes !’

‘Harriet,’ he exclaimed uncontrollably, ‘Harriet darling, I love you ! I can’t help it, Harriet—I love you !’

The terrible suddenness of his words, their import, made her tremble. She saw him moving near her through dim veils of dark sight ; she felt him grasp her hand ; she heard his rapid breathing, and he seized her and kissed her ; and she felt the soft down above his warm lips against her mouth, and seemed to see his eyes glimmering against hers.

'Oh, my' lord,' she cried, 'this is wrong of you! Lord Momesson, I am blind!' and she groped wildly with her hands.

'Forgive me! I have been wrong. It was an impulse. Forgive me!' he said as he let her go.

She started from him in the direction of the cliffs. In a moment she would be over them. He seized her with a cry of horror and drew her back, and it was a struggle for him not to kiss her once more. She was gasping for breath, but he still held her light body in his arms.

'I cannot let you go—I dare not!' Harold cried. 'Darling, you are in danger!'

'Yes, yes!' she said; 'oh, how cruel! Am I not in danger in your arms?'

'No, no, Harriet! no, I swear—good God, I love you! Forgive me! Promise me to go back to the cottage and keep away from the cursed edge. I shall not molest you. Not I, Harriet—never! You have misunderstood me. I ask forgiveness at your feet. Promise me—promise me not to go near the cliffs, and I shall let you go.'

'I promise, Lord Mbompson!'

He let his arms fall, and she escaped from him, walking hurriedly in the direction of the warm land-wind which came from over the hyacinth beds of North Bayton. He was afraid she would stumble, or lose her way over these wide downs, and he followed after her vanishing figure, penitent, ashamed, and kissing the ground where she had walked. Ah, if she would only turn and look back, and signal him one gesture of forgiveness! But she never turned. He followed her far off, and not till he had seen her reach the cottage in

safety, groping her way from telegraph-post to telegraph-post, till she met the road, did he sit down and curse himself for his folly.

Next day he came to Twilight Cottage in trepidation, but the doctor seemed to have heard nothing of what had happened. He was still sitting at his table with numerous strange books spread before him, and when Harold entered he rose to greet the Earl with the usual gigantic smile spreading itself over his face. Even though he had known and had spoken of Harold's indiscretion, the young lord was prepared to own his fault. Even if the doctor would say that it had been unchivalrous in the extreme, Harold meant to own up to it. Ah, he loved her!

Horneck, however, was apparently ignorant of the amorous violence of yesterday. He continued his discussions on the human soul, probing into the springs of conduct. But Harold listened all that morning only in a half-hearted way. He was thinking of his own conduct and of Harriet's opinion of it. He wondered when he would see her again and if she was still angry, or if she had forgiven him. He would have written her a letter condemning himself, bitterly condemning himself, but he was afraid it would fall into the wrong hands. The person who would read it to her would require to be won over, and meanwhile Harold felt shy of Horneck's knowledge of his love. Love-making has its hazards under any circumstances. But if one of the lovers is blind!

After the doctor had finished expounding a passage of Wundt he said :

'Well, my lord, Harriet hadn't fallen over the cliffs, after all!'

'No,' said Harold, starting at the mention of her

name, and turning pale. 'All the same, she oughtn't, really, to be allowed to wander over the downs. Even people with eyes sometimes fall over the cliffs and get killed.'

'She said you were very kind and solicitous about her, and that you actually made her promise never to go there unaccompanied again.'

These words pleased Harold, because they meant that she had behaved far more finely than he had had a right to expect. But he would give himself no rest till he found out fully whether she scorned him for the evil advantage he had taken of her. How he burned to tell her that he loved her through and through, blind or seeing, and that she was his first love! Luckily, as he was leaving the cottage he met her in the little entry. She had heard his voice. Perhaps in her generosity she had been waiting for him, he thought, to forgive him, to show that the sightless can be more charitable than the seeing. At any rate, her 'Good-morning, my lord,' was like balm to his heart. He made way for her. He felt her breath as she passed. Nay, she smiled at him out of her glimmering eyes of dream. Perhaps he was thankful again that at that moment she could not see his shame. But before she went she thanked him for the hyacinths he had sent the previous night.

'I only wish you could see them,' he said.

'I know them by their perfume,' she said. 'I know all the flowers.'

He went away rejoicing, and with tears in his eyes. Oh, she was more adorable than any woman with sight! Days passed, however, during which he never saw her, and he wondered how he could approach her again. He did not know that his kiss was still burning on her lips, and that he had sent through her a thrill which was

filling her with mystery. He only thought that within the cold darkness of her sightless, passionless being she might have a lofty pity for him. He, the great young lord, was willing to accept forgiveness at her feet; for this his wearying passion was too maddening and bewildering. The seas are indeed restless, and the winds and stars, but nothing is as restless as the human soul!

Now, it was Rewbell who first discovered this new restlessness of the young lord. The fact that Horneck's forenoon visits had ceased, and that the Earl now went down to Twilight Cottage every morning, set him thinking on the cause. Why should the Earl so inconvenience himself? Although Rewbell's jealousy of the doctor was now furious, he could hardly bring himself to believe that his lordship preferred to have his 'lessons'—as Rewbell contemptuously called them—in the bare little cottage, rather than in some sumptuous room at North Bayton. Suddenly he remembered that Horneck had a niece, of whose beauty he had heard. *Cherchez la femme*, to be sure, blind or seeing! In fact, Harold's present languors had all the signs of a vexed love affair. For the last few weeks Rewbell had been quietly enduring the consciousness of his diminished influence over his young master. He had observed the growth of the Earl's astounding friendship with the astounding doctor. The day had been when Harold had treated Rewbell with that frankness and generosity characteristic of him. But now, when he was not with Horneck, he might be seen walking sullenly about the grounds of North Bayton, hardly returning the salutes of his servants.

It was only Rewbell's instincts of prudence which taught him to suppress his rage. After all, the chief thing was to remain shug. He tried to believe that it

meant little to him whether the new Earl would give him the keys to his character as the old one had done. Perhaps he might procure them in any case. At any rate, it was his salary that mattered. Depend upon it, that as you reduce the motives of your life to the single motive of gain, you make it vastly easier to be fived.

Well, then, Rewbell was a very comfortable little satrap. He could spend his time fiddling while the young lord was burning his life down. He had saved money. He had put himself right with Leaf and Merridge. He had informed them—and Porlock was his witness—that the discrepancies in the late Earl's accounts were due to the generosity occasioned on the late Earl's death-bed by the late Earl's sins. But the truth was that Rewbell expected soon to be delivered from the duty of smirching his own character by pretending that it was he who had foisted Nicolay on the estate. Porlock's pious determination not to damage the young lord's soul with the news that the old lord had been rather a blackguard would slacken and begin to appear fantastic as he saw Harold gradually lost and drawn within the orbit of the unbelieving monster who was living and battenning at the gates of North Bayton. Indeed, Rewbell considered that Horneck was the most enormous parasite he had ever seen, thoroughly intent on monopolizing the Earl's vitals, and threatening to oust out all rivals. But one parasite generally holds such opinions about the other parasite its neighbour.

The only promising feature of the situation was that Lady Mompesson had at last begun to see who the real grasping interloper was. She had actually seen that Horneck, not Rewbell, had the evident mastery of her

son's life. It was Horneck who had made him an unbeliever, whereas Rewbell walked conscientiously to church every Sunday, sang in the choir, and even took a Bible-class on one occasion when the ordinary teacher was ill. In fact, Lady Mompesson was repenting the rashness and uncharitableness of her judgment of him, and remembered again that even Lord Mowhurst had taken his part. Moreover, Porlock persistently praised him.

Considering, then, his former influence on her son, she wondered if *he* could counteract the new blight of Horneck. If it took a thief to catch a thief, by all means set the one on the other immediately. This was, doubtless, a humiliating turn for her ladyship, whose distrust of Rewbell had once actually assumed the form of physical violence and personal assault.

Rewbell was very pleased, however, contenting himself with the truth of the familiar adage that Time brings revenge. The lady who has struck a gentleman with her fan may yet come submissively to his feet. Thus, to his delight, she asked if he could stay the further corruption of her son. Rewbell, while astonished that Lady Mompesson still pretended to an authority at North Bayton, which had ceased at her husband's death, had no objections to this unexpected mark of her confidence.

'But your ladyship must remember,' he said as gently as possible, 'that the Earl is the Earl. He could turn us all out! What business have we with his friendships? Even your ladyship must acknowledge that it is at his lordship's pleasure that you remain here. You are provided for otherwise. But North Bayton belongs to him alone.'

'Yes, that is true,' she said falteringly. 'But I can-

not give up my son ! I had a great influence over him before he was led astray by that shocking man.'

' Well, then,' said Rewbell, ' what if we are all wrong in our suppositions ? Doubtless the Earl spends many hours with that hateful person rightly described by your ladyship as a shocking man, but there is another inmate at Twilight Cottage. Those long hours may be spent, not with the unbeliever, but with his niece ! I have grounds for this statement.'

Lady Mompesson looked at him in horror.

' Yes,' he said, ' I have been told that the other day a fisherman, who was working in his boat at the foot of the cliffs, actually saw his lordship embrace Dr. Horneck's blind niece, kiss her, and hold her a long time in his arms ! My belief is, therefore, that Dr. Horneck is plotting to get his niece off his hands. *She*, a blind girl of ordinary birth, is to be your ladyship's successor ! It is not so much theology that is wrong with his lordship, but love—nothing less than that !'

The bolt had descended. Lady Mompesson, thoroughly shocked, affrighted, humiliated, sank and grew pale in the chair, while disillusion after disillusion thickened about her.

' No, no !' she said breathlessly ; ' do you mean to say it is *true* ?'

' Pardon me, your ladyship. I am not surprised. I have looked into the history of the family which you have honoured by an alliance. There has been a twist in every one of the Mompessons. And if his lordship loves a blind girl, doubtless he finds in his attachment some new form of morbid excitement. For all we know, a blind object of blind love may constitute a piquant form of depravity.'

• 'Hush!' exclaimed her ladyship, unwilling to face any kind of realism or pathology—'hush! I cannot listen to any such disparagement of the Mompesson name. My poor boy has the example of his father to guide him.'

'He has!' said Rewbell, hardly able to suppress a laugh.

The victory of the devil seemed tolerably complete. It was going to be a horrible modern variant of the story of the Prodigal Son. Both Lady Mompesson and Rewbell had tacitly agreed that Harold's passion for a blind girl could never be honest. Lady Mompesson was so bewildered, panic-stricken and ashamed that she asked Rewbell to spare her further news.

'But do something. Do what you can. Bribe the hideous man to take the girl away. Offer him a thousand pounds if he will do it,' said the shocked Countess. 'I knew it would come to this!'

Rewbell, pleased with his resuscitation from obscurity, promised to help to 'pull his lordship together,' and determined to begin at once. And so when he heard next day that Harold had gone to Eastdown, and that Horneck had accompanied him, he walked down to Twilight Cottage, determined to see the blind beauty at all costs. He had, besides, a pretext for the visit because Horneck's water-tank had been reported to be leaking and required looking after. It was, therefore, as manager of the estate that he went up to the door of the cottage and let the little brass knocker fall twice against it. As he stood waiting for the door to be opened, he looked over at Nicolay's cottage, and smiled when he remembered the tragic comedy which was mounting up there, too. He might even drop in on the

road back to see how Millicent and Nicolay were pulling together. Horneck's door then opened, and Rewbell told the maid that he had come to see the cistern. She knew at once who he was, and led him obsequiously in. Was Miss Harriet Paston at home? he asked. The maid said yes, and then took him in to the little parlour where Harriet was sitting.

The first object which met Rewbell's eyes was a large photograph of Lord Mompesson placed conspicuously on the mantelpiece. But doubtless it was Horneck's property, since what value could it have for the blind girl? He then turned and saw Harriet, who rose at the mention of a stranger's name, and bowed in Rewbell's direction, where she saw his figure sketched dimly against the light. Rewbell, like many others who saw her, could at first hardly believe she was blind. She moved without difficulty, even gracefully, about the room, and, at any rate, the reports of her beauty had not been exaggerated. Rewbell explained who he was. He hoped that she and Dr. Horneck were comfortable in the cottage. And how was she enjoying Sussex?

Harriet allowed him to talk in order to give her an opportunity of discovering, as was her wont, his character from his voice. It was not so rich or full a voice as the young Earl's. She felt caution and cynicism in it, whereas the Earl's had seemed full of tremor and passion and pity.

' You are Lord Mompesson's secretary ? ' she asked.

' Yes,' said Rewbell. ' I have come about the tank.'

' The tank ! ' she repeated ; ' I thought you were to bring me the hyacinths to-day.'

' Oh, indeed ! ' exclaimed Rewbell ; ' his lordship said nothing about them.'

'Ah, he has forgotten!' she said.

'Great lords have sometimes short memories,' said Rewbell, looking at her, and beginning to share his lordship's admiration of her.

'Does his lordship give you all his confidences?' she asked, but in a peculiarly hesitating way.

'Yes, every one of them,' said Rewbell. 'I've known him since he was a boy.'

'He is still very young, they tell me.'

'You must have seen him—I mean, you must have been introduced to him, he is such a great friend of your uncle,' remarked Rewbell.

'I have heard his voice,' she said. 'It is a young, passionate voice.'

Rewbell, smiling at the thought that craft and tact never desert a woman, even when she is blind, decided to sit still as long as he could, and hear what she had got to say. All her thoughts were evidently running on the young lord.

'He is said to be very handsome?' she asked; 'at least, my uncle says so. And he is said to be beloved by you all.'

'He *is* handsome,' said Rewbell, wondering why it should matter to the blind. 'His cousin, Miss Adelaide Bevering, is known to admire him. She was here at his coming of age.'

He paused.

'Who is that?' she asked quickly.

'Oh, it has always been understood that he will marry her. Indeed, the ~~match~~ <sup>marriage</sup> will probably be announced this spring, when he and the ~~Countess~~ <sup>Miss</sup> Bevering ~~will~~ <sup>are</sup> in London for the season.'

He noticed that she quivered.

'Oh, really!' she exclaimed, rising as if in excitement, but settling herself down as quickly again.

'Yes, that's what's said.'

She was silent, but the crafty secretary saw blind consternation in her face.

'His lordship, as you say,' continued Rewbell, 'is still very young, and has sown, I must say, comparatively few wild oats.'

'Now, tell me,' she said quickly, as if she could not keep herself from asking, could not help giving utterance to the tide of wild feeling within her. 'Ah! do pity me, and tell me—I shall repeat nothing you say; do not be afraid—but tell me: is Lord Mompesson . . . is he a high character? is he noble?'

'But surely you oughtn't to ask *me* such a question?' said Rewbell. 'Besides, your uncle ought to know by this time.'

'Yes, yes, but—I am speaking about his relations to women. You see, it can be of no personal interest to *me*, but we who are blind become so curious about people's characters. We hear them discussed, you know. We try to judge them by their voices. I have heard so much about Lord Motpesson; he has been so kind to my uncle. I hope he will have a brilliant future.'

Rewbell looked at her very intently; a beautiful girl frightfully handicapped, struggling through darkness to reach a knowledge of the world, and already full of suspicions of it, a wonderful mutilated beauty unable to play her rôle, because, although possessing all the instincts of her sex, she had been denied the priceless gift of sight. Rewbell began to understand his lordship's piquant sensation in regard to her. 'He is hankering after the absolute possession of her, which her blindness would

make possible !' What a thought ! He shared the excitement of it. It would almost be as amazing as necrophilism, a new chapter in the terrors of human love. A rage against Harold rose up within him, not simply because he was indignant at the possibility of her betrayal by the passionate boy, but because the passionate boy had been the first to discover her. Nay, the terrible man was already as fiercely on fire with her as Harold himself. It was the first time he had been on fire, too. It was the first time he had felt reckless. He came near her, and began to whisper hoarsely into her ear.

'I know what is troubling you,' he said. 'Good God ! I know. I have come to speak to you about it. His mother has sent me to warn you.'

'Oh, what is it?' she asked in terror.

He came still closer, and whispered still more hoarsely.

'Yes, yes!' he whispered. 'It was *seen* ! That day at the cliffs ! When great lords kiss, ah, beware ! He wishes to . . . to betray you !'

'Oh, how dreadful to be blind !' she shrieked. 'If I could see you ! If I could look into your face at this moment, to see if you are speaking the truth ! You have divined my secret. Ah, ah, what a fate !'

'Yes,' he continued, 'I have taken my life into my hands. His mother, the Countess, wishes to warn you. Come up to North Bayton and ask her if I am lying to you. She has sent me to save you. Now, will you ever mention my name ?'

'Never,' she said, 'never, no matter what happens. Tell me, then, is he infamous ?'

'He comes of an infamous stock. Do you know who your neighbour is ?' said the too infamous man, heaping his calumny. 'Your uncle hasn't told you ?'

'No,' she said.

'Very well, then—a girl his father ruined. Like father, like son!'

'Really, really! is it possible?' she exclaimed.

'Beware!' exclaimed Rewbell, still only above his breath. 'He is a great lord; you are a blind little maid. He will forget you. Would he run the risk of a blind heir?'

'I felt it. I rushed from him that day. But he has been heaping flowers on me ever since—withering flowers.'

Rewbell looked round the room, and then outside the window. There was no one visible.

'You are beautiful,' he said. 'If I could create a mirror in which you could see!'

She shrank back from him doubtfully.

'I love you!' he exclaimed, just as Harold had exclaimed, and seized her and kissed her, as Harold had seized and kissed her. But it was a different kiss.

'O God! are all men liars and cowards!' she cried as she struggled to release herself. 'Let me go! Leave me! *He* did the same!'

'Yes, but *he* is Lord Mompesson. *I* would marry you,' said the distracted man.

'Leave me!' she said again. 'What a place my uncle has brought me to!'

'Trust me; I warn you,' he said, retreating, and feeling that, if his name was now in jeopardy, it was in no greater jeopardy than his lordship's. 'You are safe with me.'

'Safe! I am safe nowhere in the world! Is this the world? How can I trust *you*? You may have been telling lies about him,' she said, and the words stung

him to the heart. 'Leave, or I *will* mention your name.'

He was about to leave, feeling that a blind girl had worsted him. But his wits did not desert him.

'I tell you,' he said, 'come up to the Countess and ask. Find out if I am a liar. Meantime I trust you not to mention my name to *him*.'

Then he left her weeping in the room. He forgot the other object of his visit. He forgot to look in at the Nicolays. And as he went back to North Bayton he cursed the young Earl, exclaiming: 'Oh, damned villain!'

As for Harriet, she had at least learned, in spite of her blindness, one lesson in the mixed ethics of love—that aristocrat and democrat both love in the same way.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE MAN WITH TWO FATHERS-IN-LAW

IT must not be forgotten that, although Dr. Horneck was now far happier than he had ever been, he was still profoundly agitated by the loss of his daughter. No doubt the friendship—or, rather, the discipleship—of the young Earl was a great source of pleasure to him, but that had only been one of the pleasing accidents of his arrival at Eight Bells. He never forgot that he had come for the purpose of living close to Nicolay, whose goings out and comings in he watched with a persistence and anxiety which were amazing. Indeed, if he ever chanced to hear the click of Nicolay's gate, he used to start to the window to see if it was actually the furtive man himself who was emerging, and sometimes under cover of night or of the mist, which often lay low on these uplands, he would follow him for miles along the road that leads to Eight Bells or to Seadown. He seemed to be driven to pursue him by some instinct, and the instinct now became such a habit that there was no wonder if Nicolay detected and resented it.

I said that one of the windows of Dr. Horneck's bedroom looked on to the gable of Nicolay's cottage. But the window of Nicolay's bedroom was in this gable, so

that those two windows faced each other. Often, indeed, Nicolay used to see the doctor staring opposite, and fixed there as if by a kind of fascination. And on such occasions Nicolay either left the room hastily, or pulled down the blind, or watched from behind a curtain the movements of his persistent and implacable foe. Horneck knew that Nicolay often went at night to the tavern at Eight Bells, where he used to tell yarns of his life in the Bush, and spend freely the shillings of the late Earl of Mompesson, which now came to him in a plentiful and regular supply. The loafers and swaggerers of Eight Bells, raw country lads of enormous strength who would have been better in the army, thought that Nicolay was a real acquisition. He stood them drink, did he not? excited them with descriptions of Bush life, lent them the late Earl's shillings, and was visibly pleased at the popularity he had won amongst them. The much-travelled man, in fact, held his audience spell-bound with his narrative of ranch life, of the chase of wild herds and the capture of 'cleanskins' on Hirton's Run, magnifying his adventures with the blacks, mentioning gold-digging, night-camping, the shooting of big game, and numerous midnight terrors and escapades. He recurred to these things over and over, to the delight of his listeners, amid tobacco reek and the noise and clatter of beer-jugs and whisky-glasses in the low-roofed, dimly-lighted tavern.

Now and again Horneck dropped in as if by accident about half an hour after Nicolay had entered. A general silence used to follow the doctor's entrance, perhaps because these drinkers were always interested in looking at so huge a man, who seemed a kind of Goliath among them all, or because they felt that, being superior to

themselves, they should be silent in his presence. At any rate, Nicolay used to leave off talking about Australia as soon as he saw the doctor, and go into a corner to play cards for an hour with some of Dicky Nye's farm-labourers with whom he had struck up an acquaintance.

Sometimes, however, Horneck might remain unobserved for a few minutes, especially on market-nights, when the tavern was crowded. But suddenly Nicolay, as if detecting his presence, would stop and turn round. Then, as if to include the doctor within the limits of his generosity, he would offer him a drink, which the doctor, too anxious not to lose his man, would accept. And while the drink went freely Horneck used to observe, not merely Nicolay more closely, but all these types gathered round him, typical characters of agricultural life. If he ever suggested that he might accompany Nicolay home, since they were so near neighbours, Nicolay had always an excuse for lingering, and used even to walk a mile or two beyond Eight Bells rather than go home with the doctor, although, perhaps, eleven o'clock had already struck from the tower of Porlock's church. But now and again the doctor used to be in wait for him as he came staggering home over the white moonlit road, carrying a lantern, which seemed curiously unnecessary, since even the wide downs were moonlighted, and over the sea there was a great moon road, darkened now and again by a passing ship. On darker nights Horneck feared that Nicolay might actually go reeling over the cliffs at the point where the downs narrow, about a mile from Eight Bells, and the road and the cliffs run almost parallel.

One night when he overtook the staggering man,

Nicolay, lifting the lantern and letting it shine on Horneck's face, gave a shriek of terror, and then let the lantern fall and be shattered between their feet.

Horneck asked what was wrong, and Nicolay, collecting his drunken wits, wished the doctor 'a good-evening,' saying he had got a start, but that now he was very glad indeed of company home. Horneck, smiling ghastly in the dark, walked with him over the lonely road—lonely and noiseless except for the sounds of the sea wailing for ever round the cliffs. Then they came in sight of the cottages, and Horneck, saying good-night, waited till he saw him stagger into his house. In short, Dr. Horneck appeared to take an unusual interest in the life of his son-in-law. He used to think about him even when he was engaged reading with Lord Mompesson, and certainly never a day passed but he contrived to see him, and if possible to speak to him. Since they were so close neighbours, this was easily accomplished. The doctor used to laugh very heartily when every Sunday, about a quarter of an hour before the bells of Porlock Church might be heard ringing in the village three miles off, Nicolay emerged, Sunday-dressed, and proceeded to church. Horneck even felt tempted to accompany him, and would have liked to hear the hollow-voiced man joining in the Morning Prayer or the Litany, and watch him enjoying the Collects.

The truth was that from the moment the doctor heard of Nicolay's marriage with Millicent Heath his suspicions of him were redoubled. Indeed, the man who had said that life for him was now empty and meaningless since Elsie was dead, but who had a few days after taken part in a vile matrimonial job, seemed to invite suspicion. Horneck, hardly able to believe the news,

hurried to Eight Bells, and when he heard that the bargain was already complete, and that the fallen Millicent had actually become Nicolay's wife, his doubts were confirmed. Nicolay's strange demeanour, now insolent and rancorous, now submissive and conciliatory, would have been detected by even a man less sharp in his wits than the penetrating doctor.

'*You* here!' Nicolay had exclaimed whenever he saw the doctor at Eight Bells.

'Yes,' said Horneck, but said no more for the moment.

'Devil take you! what's that to you if I marry again?' said Nicolay.

'A great deal,' replied Horneck—'very much indeed.'

'Indeed!'

'Yes,' cried Horneck savagely, and hardly able to control the voluminous mass of suspicions and doubts that were agitating him. 'Can you dare go through such a marriage? Tell me the truth, sir: Were you . . . were you thankful to get quit of my Elsie?'

Nicolay, thoroughly cowed, murmured no, indeed, but that he required a wife, and that Elsie had always told him to marry again. But when Horneck heard the exact circumstances about Millicent, and how that Nicolay seemed about to destroy Elsie's memory by taking as her successor a fallen girl, and thus helping for his own gain merely to wash out the sin of another man, his fury was greatly increased. Clearly, of course, Nicolay, if a widower, could marry another wife as soon as he pleased; and when he mentioned the fact to Horneck, and told the enraged doctor to mind his own business, an onlooker might have said that he had right on his side. But Horneck was more agitated by the fear that Elsie had been ill-treated, and deter-

mined to sift the matter to the bottom, with the help of Wharton, who had seen them together at Hirton's Run. At any rate, he could not resist following the man night and day.

At first Nicolay thought that his father-in-law, being a needy man, was wishing to share in his new fortunes. And, indeed, he would have been very glad to give him money to get quit of him. He actually offered some, which Horneck scornfully rejected. And then it gradually began to dawn on the perturbed man that Horneck actually suspected, perhaps even knew, his betrayal of Elsie, and was now settled like a goad in his side. So that when he heard that the doctor had decided to remain in Eight Bells—nay, that he had really secured a cottage next his own—he became more agitated, and even began to think about fleeing. But wherever he turned he saw his pursuer, and there seemed no hope of deliverance from the infernal presence. Had he persistently maintained an insolent attitude, and had taken steps to overcome Horneck's interference and threaten him with the law for molesting him, it is very likely that the doctor's suspicions would have slept. But as it was, Nicolay now and again seemed desirous of appeasing him, sent him small gifts, asked very, very kindly after the doctor's and Harriet's health, even offered to dig their little garden for them and plant spring seeds, or run messages to Eight Bells. Nay, the wretched man, by one of those mistakes in policy which seem to reveal the truth by a flash, actually called his house Elsie Cottage!

The sight of Elsie's name painted on the gatepost rather tended to remind Horneck of her loss and keep the bitterness of it in his memory, if, indeed, there was

otherwise any chance of her being for an instant forgotten. But the way the thing had been done, the easily-detected insincerity of the man, who came smoking one morning, and asked the doctor to come and look at the gatepost, and then his banal smile and anxiety for commendation when he showed Horneck Elsie's name painted in red letters on the trumpery little post, made the doctor cautious in his response to such advances. His proffers of assistance were politely rejected, and his presents returned, until the unfortunate man went raging about his little cottage expecting imminent destruction. Certainly if he had known that Horneck had decided to accompany him to Eight Bells, he would have thought twice before he accepted Millicent and her dowry and her sin. If the doctor had even been living in Eight Bells, life might have been more tolerable. But now he was a neighbour so subtle, so near, that Nicolay believed that even to whisper would be unsafe.

During the time when the cottages were being built, and as Nicolay watched Horneck's rising simultaneously with his own, he began to ask himself if he was really prepared to settle down beside such a man. He felt that sooner or later the doctor would get to know that Elsie was not dead. Every time he met him he saw that his father-in-law was becoming more and more hostile. Nicolay was overpowered in his presence, and had long since ceased to look him in the face. He wondered whether he might not be driven to leave Eight Bells altogether. And, in fact, he proposed to Millicent that she should accept the equivalent of her cottage in money, and that they should betake themselves to London. Eight Bells, he said, was too sleepy

and quiet, no fun there at all. But in London, where no one would know of her disgrace, she could enjoy herself to her heart's content—theatres every night, if she wished—and she would never be terrified by her old father any more. Millicent, however, sturdily refused to give up her cottage. Every day increased old Heath's dotage and rendered him less formidable. She meant to stick to her cottage, she said. This, indeed, was a great cause of quarrel between them, and Nicolay seemed determined to make her yield. But she told him to go away if he pleased; she did not need him, he was nothing to her. Then when he upbraided her with her disgrace, and called her nasty names, and said she was unfit to be a wife, but ought to be a night-walker, she taunted him with his low dodge of securing a wife on account of her money, and she believed, she said, that he had murdered his other one.

'I tell you what it is,' said Millicent: 'you're afraid of Dr. Horneck; I see it whenever him and you are together. Is it because you maltreated his daughter as you would maltreat *me*?'

'It's a lie!' exclaimed Nicolay, turning white.

'Is it?' said she. 'Maybe, but Teddy Wharton told me it was a common story at Hirton's Run how you used her, and that once you offered to sell her to a black.'

'It's a lie!' repeated Nicolay.

'Maybe,' said she. 'He knows best, but it's evident you'd give a lot to escape the doctor. Teddy told me I was to watch myself, and that if you began on me the way as you began on her, I was just to tell him. And that I will!'

'It's a lie!' repeated Nicolay, feeling as if the coil were tightening.

These warnings, however, made him submissive for the time, but he entered his cottage expecting that the next months would turn out to be ghastly and uncomfortable for him. His first thought on rising every morning was, Is Horneck looking across? He already had the illusion common to a criminal, that every man, woman and child knows about his crime. He had not reckoned with the fact that both the doctor and Wharton were going to settle at Eight Bells. And although he knew that Wharton had left Hirton's Run long before Elsie had been abandoned, still, he believed that perhaps he might be in possession of the secret and might disclose it to Horneck. For instance, Elsie might have escaped, or the news might have trickled down to Hirton's Run. And what was to prevent any of Wharton's pals, who corresponded with him, telling the whole history in a letter? At any rate, try as he might, the image of Elsie never left his brain. He still seemed to hear her dreadful cries as she was being dragged into the arms of the great naked tribesman in the rocky Australian valley. Millicent, indeed, in spite of the curse that was now upon her, might have made any man forget another woman, because she was a pretty little wench. But Nicolay could not forget the other one he had betrayed. Besides, Millicent hated him thoroughly, and would have none of him. She never allowed him to come near her. She had been compelled to marry him in such a hurry that she had hardly looked at him, and before she knew where she was he possessed her as his wife. The longer she knew him, the more she was convinced that his conscience was as uneasy as her own. Indeed, it seemed as if Providence had placed them together in order that each might

torment the other for past sin. And Horneck used often to hear their bickerings through the open windows.

Since he had arrived at Eight Bells, Hörneck had been questioning Wharton about 'that villain,' as he always called his son-in-law. And, indeed, Wharton, by what he was able to tell, only added to the doctor's excitement. To begin with, it was Wharton who had brought him that letter which Elsie had written on the eve of her attempted flight from Timbrow's Inn. Although Horneck had read it and reread it with indignation, he had not yet brought Nicolay face to face with it. He would do so later on. It ran as follows :

'MY EVER DEAR FATHER,—

'This is to let you know that I am about to make an attempt to escape from here. I can bear living with him no longer. I was told by Mr. Wharton, who is carrying this letter to you, that Nicolay once said, half in joke and half in earnest, to a group of stockmen here, that he would sell me to a black. I believe it! All the way up he said I was only a piece of useless baggage, and that I couldn't earn my bread, whereas from the beginning I have just been his beast of burden. Well, then, he is going up-country to-morrow, and I am taking the chance of escaping. Mr. Hirton, the owner of this place, is very kind, and is going to help me to escape.' (Ah, poor confiding, innocent Elsie!) 'Father, how I shall embrace you! I have been punished for leaving you. The little lodging in the Strand seems Paradise now. How I wish I were sitting beside you again. Forgive me, father. I am longing to be your daughter again. But even although you were to turn me at the door, life in the London streets

would be better than this. Think of living under a threat of being sold to a savage tribe! I am risking danger in thus attempting to escape, but I would risk anything to be near *you* again.

'Your ELSIE.'

• Horneck had waited for her week after week, looking out from his window in the Strand, and expecting every cab to draw up beneath it, and every foot on the stair to be Elsie's foot. But as the weeks grew into months his excitement increased, till one day Nicolay entered and gave him the story of her death, and the sprig of golden-wattle as a memento of her grave.

Horneck, however, was too cautious to blurt out all his suspicions at once, not merely because there was a chance that the man's tale might actually be true, since it is well known that fevers rage in that part of Australia, but because if it were not true it would be safer to entrap the man by a stealthy process of investigation. To warn him of what was coming would only facilitate his escape. Besides, Horneck ran the risk of a serious charge of libel if he brought any damaging allegation against his son-in-law, such as that he had murdered his wife.

His story was that Elsie had died in a wild, unexplored, and uninhabited part of the country, where doctors' certificates of death were, of course, impossible to be had. All that Horneck could do, therefore, was to endure the agony of doubt, nurse his suspicions, and watch his son-in-law until the favourable moment for denouncing him as a criminal presented itself. Indeed, he disclosed these terrors to no one in Eight Bells except to Wharton, whom he questioned as often as he could. Wharton said yes, indeed, that it was currently reported

at Hirton's Run that Mrs. Nicolay had rather a bad time.

Wharton took the thing rather as a joke, and was astonished at the doctor's madness. Never a day he saw him but some question on the subject would be sure to be asked. Wharton had no love for Nicolay, and cared nothing whether his character was made black or white. Many a time Nicolay had offered to stand him drinks at *The Eight Bells*, but Wharton, urged by the doctor, generally refused. When Horneck asked him if he was prepared to repeat in Nicolay's hearing the rumours that used to be current at Hirton's Run, Wharton said of course he would, and that he wasn't frightened of Nicolay, but would break his neck if he contradicted him.

So that one day Horneck, thoroughly maddened by his doubts regarding poor Elsie's end, and observing that Nicolay was becoming more and more afraid of him, confronted the wretched man in his own parlour. He walked in without having knocked, and, since there was no one in the parlour, he sat down and awaited his victim. He looked about to see if there were any traces of Elsie—any of her little drawings, for instance, in which she used to take such delight. But he saw nothing. The room was very meagrely furnished, and, indeed, was half empty. Presently Nicolay entered, and discovered the gigantic man sitting astride a chair.

'Oh, you!' he exclaimed in tones of astonishment.

'Yes,' said Horneck, 'so it is.'

'I suppose,' said Nicolay, breathing quickly, 'you've come to see Millicent. She's getting on nicely, though, and hasn't had pain these four days.'

'No, I haven't come for any such purpose,' said

Horneck. 'Does she wish me? If so, I can see her, of course.'

'No, no,' said Nicolay, 'not at all. We're not so *very* rich, doctor, as to be able to afford fees *every* day.'

'I wouldn't charge her a fee,' said Horneck, fixing him now by a glare.

'Wouldn't you like the window shut?' asked Nicolay, going up to it for the purpose.

'Yes, and the door too,' said Horneck.

'You're as brusque as a general to-day, doctor,' said Nicolay, with a slight tone of reproach.

'Look here,' said the doctor, after Nicolay had shut the door, and the window: 'I've come to speak to you about . . . about . . . yes, yes, about *Elsie*, do you hear?'

'Well!' exclaimed Nicolay.

'Here's a letter I've never yet shown you—a letter from *her* which Wharton brought to me. I shall read it to you now, sir!'

Horneck then slowly read every sentence of Elsie's letter, pausing at the end of each sentence to glance at Nicolay, who was in great agitation. After he had read the sentence in which Elsie had said that Nicolay had threatened to hand her over to the blacks, Nicolay shouted, 'It's a lie!' but in so broken a voice as to indicate his terror.

'Oh, no, no, no!' cried Horneck, with increasing emphasis; 'my child would never tell a lie. It is you, sir, who are the liar! Wharton is witness to the truth of what my child says and suffered.'

'I tell you,' said Nicolay, still sitting on his chair as if fixed there and paralyzed by the doctor's glance, 'it's a bloomin' lie!'

'Oh God!' cried Horneck, rushing up to him, and

almost seizing him, 'what have you done with her? What did you do to my child? She ought to have come home. Where is she? Where is Elsie?'

'I gave you a bit of the wattle, didn't I?' asked Nicolay, affrighted.

'Did you murder her, then,' shrieked Horneck, 'under the wattle?'

'She died of fever, as I've told you over and over again.'

'Tell me every symptom. Write down every symptom. Give me the date. Give me the symptoms, I tell you! What were they?'

Nicolay gave the symptoms, but in so confused a way that the doctor detected him more than once in error. And when he pressed him, he began to rail on Elsie, and tell the story of her flight with Hirton—how that he found her in Hirton's house, where she had spent a night forty miles from the cattle-station.

'I don't believe a word of it, sir—not one word,' said Horneck.

'Ha, ha!' said Nicolay, conscious of having scored a little point. 'Bring your Wharton! Will he deny *that*?'

Horneck said he would bring Wharton, and Nicolay said, 'Good!' So that when the doctor and Wharton came next day there was quite a small babel in the parlour.

'Isn't it true,' asked Horneck, 'that he was cruel to my daughter, and threatened to give her to the blacks as soon as he got an opportunity?'

'Yes,' said Wharton.

'It's a lie!' said Nicolay.

'*You* shut up!' called Wharton. 'Your wife told me herself she was wishing to escape.'

'Yes,' said Nicolay, sneering. 'Ain't it true that she did escape with Hirton, passed a night with him, and that I had to leave the camp that night in pursuit of her?'

Wharton admitted that Elsie had gone off with Hirton, and that he couldn't guarantee Hirton's conduct. Nicolay, quite hilarious, turned in triumph to Horneck.

'And I rode hot after her, and brought her back, and she asked my forgiveness, and gave me money she stole from Hirton. And then we went up-country, where, of course, *you* didn't see us again,' continued Nicolay, jubilant, and addressing Wharton.

'Damn it all!' said he, 'what have *I* got to do with yer quarrels?'

'Didn't I ride after her?' asked Nicolay.

'He did, though,' said Wharton, turning to Horneck.

'Yes, yes,' said Horneck, 'that may be. My child in this letter says plainly she wished to escape. She hides nothing.'

'Ay, but she went off with Jack Hirton,' says Nicolay.

'My child may have been deceived or kidnapped. I am certain she never did anything wrong!' exclaimed Horneck, with the tears in his eyes. 'But the question is, What did you do with her afterwards? Your threat to rid yourself of her may have all the more easily become a reality after her attempt to escape, because then furious jealousy would have possessed you, and you would have wished to punish her in your own way.'

'Well, I know nothing about *that*,' said Wharton. 'I never saw him or her again.'

Nicolay, smiling with delight, asked Horneck what he was up to now, and told him 'to clear out of his

cottage, threatening if he didn't take the necessary steps to compel him. Horneck lifted his hat and walked out bewildered, and feeling that Wharton had failed him, while Wharton, not caring how the quarrel ended, sat on drinking with Nicolay, and talking about the life they used to have up at Hirton's Run. Nicolay lost no time in winning him over. Indeed, the persuasive man there and then concluded a friendship, and when Wharton asked a small loan to pay some betting debts, Nicolay readily consented. Wharton had vainly asked Horneck for the same sum, so that now he had reason to change sides, and rather support Nicolay against the niggardly doctor. From that day, in fact, he agreed to look upon Horneck as a madman, whose head was full of hallucinations about his child, and almost as doting as old Heath, in short. At any rate, the next time the doctor attempted to question him anew on Nicolay's character, Wharton told him rudely to mind his own business.

But Horneck refused to be quietened. He was still haunted by the suspicions of foul play, because the fact that Nicolay took no legal action against him, in spite of the serious charges he had made, was sufficient proof, he thought, of the man's guilt. And, luckily, his opportunities for watching and harassing him rather increased. For Millicent was on the eve of giving birth to the late Earl's child, and she insisted on having Horneck's help. Nicolay, desirous of overcoming her hostility to himself, yielded, and had thus to endure the sight of Horneck's presence daily in the house. The doctor knew of Millicent's hatred for her husband, because he had already observed it at Mrs. Ashbee's. He therefore took the opportunity of questioning her

on her opinion of him. Did he ever speak of his former wife, for instance ?

' Yes,' said Millicent.

' What does he say ?' asked the doctor.

' He says she was an upsettin' thing, and not half as handy as me, and that she ran off with a man Hirton, but that he caught her and punished her for it before she died.'

' Never believe it, Millicent !'

' Well, I don't wonder at her runnin' away from him.'

' Does he pretend ever to have loved her ?' asked Horneck.

' I don't know,' said Millicent. ' But she must have been mad to choose such a man. It's my punishment to have him.'

And here Millicent broke down in tears, and said she was having a dreadful life of retribution, and asked the doctor to be kind to her in the coming struggle. Horneck said he would, but recurred again to Nicolay.

' Can you account for the man's restlessness ? He is never two minutes in the same place. Does it not look as if something were troubling him, some . . . some *crime*, maybe ?' asked Horneck, with his voice rising to a hoarse whisper.

' Oh, doctor, don't look at me that way !' exclaimed Millicent. ' You frighten me with your eyes.'

' Don't be afraid—don't be afraid,' said Horneck, quieting himself down a little ; ' I've nothing to say against *you*.'

' Oh, but everyone has !' said Millicent. ' I believe everyone knows my . . . my disgrace.'

' Not at all,' said Horneck ; ' it's been kept wonderfully secret. And, although *your* marriage may be a

punishment to you, it has saved your reputation, I believe. But, Millicent, I'm not talking about that. I respect you more than I respect your husband. Tell me, now, what do you think of him? Does he ever mention my Elsie? Oh, if you knew how I loved my child! And I'm afraid, do you hear, that that man has . . . has destroyed her in some way. It is a dreadful thing to say, but I am haunted by the fear of it!

'Yes, I believe it,' said Millicent. 'I've heard him in nightmares raving about at night, saying, "I didn't do it! I didn't do it!" and that must mean he *did*.'

'Didn't do what? Now, Millicent, dear child,' said Horneck, very excited, 'now calm yourself, and tell me everything. Would you be prepared to say this in a law court? Would you be prepared to swear that you heard these words?'

'Yes,' said she—'yes, I would. I would say anything to annoy him. Oh, doctor, but I'm in pain!'

'Yes, yes, Millicent,' he said; 'bear a little longer. The birth of sin means such travail and torment, my poor child! Now, just tell me, do *you* think, by what you can judge of him, that he has done something wrong to my child? We must be careful, Millicent; it is all so nebulous, and intangible, and far off. My fears may be groundless.'

'Oh, yes, yes; he could do anything wrong—*anything!*' said Millicent. 'I hate him! Every woman would flee in terror from him. Doesn't he look like a murderer?'

'Millicent, do *you* think so too? Has he murdered Elsie?' exclaimed Horneck, full of these flames of doubts.

'Doctor,' she said, 'don't trouble me more. I'm in pain, do you hear? I can't speak for it. Don't question me—please don't! My own punishment's enough for me to bear.'

Horneck gave her medicine, and came away. In the little garden he met Nicolay, who was curiously obsequious again, and asked the doctor how he was, and how Miss Harriet was, and if he thought the fine spring weather would continue. Then he asked how Millicent was progressing, and Horneck said she was doing very well. And then, apparently determined to be very sweet, he asked the doctor if he wouldn't have a smoke:

'No!' said Horneck, unable to say it more politely, and looking past Nicolay, but with so concentrated a glance, as if he saw something, that Nicolay started and turned round.

It was always difficult for Horneck, when face to face with him, to keep from crushing him physically as a man crushes vermin. And at that moment, tormented anew by all that Millicent had been saying, he could not help exclaiming, although with hardly any justification:

'What are you starting at, sir?'

'What are you *staring* at, sir?' replied Nicolay, mockingly. 'As for me, I thought there was someone in the garden, since you were staring so intently.'

'Yes, yes, it's the voice of God walking in the garden!' exclaimed Horneck, almost rushing upon him.

Nicolay drew back, astonished at Horneck's fierce and vindictive look.

'Them miracles don't happen now. That's what you're teachin' the Earl, ain't it?' sneered Nicolay.

'What kind of bee have you got in your bonnet to-day, Dr. Horneck? Look, there is someone, after all.'

He pointed to old Heath, who was fumbling with the latch of the garden-gate, so that Nicolay was having a visit from both fathers-in-law at the same time. On the whole, he preferred old Heath, because although he was indeed a considerable vexation, since no one knew at what hour he might turn up—sometimes even twelve o'clock at night—to call Millicent disagreeable names, still, he was not the terror that Horneck was; and, since all his fury was directed against Millicent, Nicolay generally welcomed him. Hardly a day passed but he came in and demanded to see Millicent, who had resolutely shut herself up from the public gaze. And she generally took the precaution, when she heard his old shuffling footsteps on the gravel, to lock herself in, so that he was left to wage his paternal warfare against her out in the lobby. She used to hear him for half an hour at a time knocking at the door and calling her bad names. For although he was growing feebler every day, and his memory was a gap, the one thought which remained as a link between himself and the world was her disgrace. He perpetually ignored Nicolay as merely a stop-gossip, and knew keenly where the secret lay. Indeed, he was more than once found tottering up the avenue at North Bayton, casting imprecations on the House of Mompesson.

One day Lady Mompesson found him gesticulating among the rhododendron bushes, making his way among them zigzag. Now and again he shook his stick at the castle, to which he was apparently staggering like some lame figure of Fate too late for vengeance. Lady Mompesson called 'Samuel' for he was thus known familiarly

at Eight Bells. When she saw him stumbling against the bushes, it was the first time she had really felt the inconvenience of having such creatures placed at her gates, with easy access to the policies. She called to him again, but he did not hear her until she came up to him and took him by the arm, and asked where he was going.

'Samuel,' she said, 'what is wrong? You are breaking the bushes. You have no right to be here.'

Old Heath, as soon as he recognised her, lifted his hat and began to excuse himself.

'Yer ladyship,' says he, 'doän't know!'

'Yes, yes, I know what is troubling you,' she said. 'You have my sympathy. It has taken your head, they tell me, poor Samuel! Millicent has been a deep disappointment to me as well.'

'Milly! Yer ladyship do know! What can be done for 'er? What can yer ladyship do? I be waitin' months, but what vengince can I take on a coärpse? His young lordship might do somethin' to wipe out the stain of the old lordship, and let me die in peace.'

'I was not here when it occurred, Samuel,' said Lady Mompesson.

'No, ye warn't, yer ladyship, else it wouldn't 'ave happened. Ye would 'ave kept him straight.'

'How are you liking your cottage, Samuel? My husband was very kind to you in providing for your old age. You should be thankful for your mercies. The Lord never sends a sorrow but He sends some joy on its heels. My husband, you see, was the willing instrument. I am very glad you have got the little cottage, although I object to its position. And cer-

tainly, if *I* had my way, Millicent would never be allowed to take up house at our very gates, and disgrace the roadside. I can't make up my mind to visit her,' said Lady Mompesson emphatically.

'Oh, it's all very well, the cottages,' replied old Heath; 'but them were bribes when he was half-way down the grave. A clean cottage beän't so good as a clean, innocent da'ter. I never thought th' old Earl 'ad be a common rascal.'

'Samuel, you are raving! What do you mean? They tell me you are quite doted now, poor man!'

'Whaät, bless ye? Doän't ye agree, then? Woän't yer ladyship take pity? If the Earl didn't wrong my child, wh<sup>e</sup> did?' asked the old miller, thumping his stick on the grass.

'Stop spoiling the grass, Samuel, and go away!' said Lady Mompesson sternly. 'You are a shocking old man! You are raving. Such ingratitude! One would have thought that even an unhinged mind would at least have remembered to be grateful. Your friends should take care of you, and not allow you to go about saying such dreadful things.'

She ordered him down the avenue, and he tottered away, shaking his head and cursing the House of Mompesson, while her ladyship thought of complaining to the police sergeant. Old Heath's thoughts gyrated unweariedly round the one subject; and wherever he went he might be heard muttering these ineffectual curses of old age.

So that, as he came hobbling up Nicolay's little garden walk that afternoon, he immediately demanded how his 'harlot da'ter' was getting on, and began to force his way into the house. Horneck told him she

was well enough under the circumstances, and said he was not to molest her.

'She's a reg'lar harlot, as has waasted her life and mine. You doän't know who helped her to do it?' says old Heath, taking hold of Horneck's sleeve, and pointing up to North Bayton. 'I'm just waiting to see if nobhut 'll help me with revinges.'

Then he went into the cottage.

Nicolay laughed and nodded to Horneck, who, however, left him without saying a word.

Now, the birth of Millicent's son caused considerable excitement among the gossips of Eight Bells. Even since she had left Mrs. Ashbee's lodgings comments, presumably directed by Mrs. Ashbee herself, had been made on the fact that the birth would take place only about five months after wedlock. And so, as a matter of fact, it happened. Nicolay therefore, as the supposed cause of these irregularities, began to be censured with some severity.

Mrs. Ashbee had entertained her numerous friends with tales about the curiosities of her recent lodgers—how that hardly a day passed but old Heath wished to strike Millicent, and that the girl used to spend hours at a time weeping very bitterly, and refusing to approach her husband, and how, finally, there seemed to exist between, Nicolay and Horneck the strangest kind of hatred. Besides, Millicent's long seclusion at North Bayton before her marriage, and the fact that she had hardly been once seen after it; the marriage itself, which was sudden and mysterious; the admirable little cottage, which seemed to have been specially built for her; the ravings of old Heath, and his imprecations on the Mom-pesson name, which were all the more unintelligible

since he had been so much the winner by the late Earl's death; finally, the strange character of Nicolay, who, in spite of his generosities in liquor at *The Eight Bells* tavern, was considered a rather curious and uncompanionable man—all this offered a large mass of conjecture to those interested in local affairs.

Old Heath's ravings, of course, were explained by his dotage, but certain gossips shook their heads, as if in search of other explanations. At any rate, it was known that Porlock had refused to marry Millicent, and no one doubted that he would refuse to baptize the infant.

Most people, like Mrs. Ashbee, pointed to Nicolay as the cause of these distresses; others, however, asked if Nicolay was not merely the stop-gossip to shield a name which Millicent could never be persuaded to pronounce. But the night after the birth, when Nicolay was drinking among a crowd in the bar parlour at *The Eight Bells*, he was chaffed good-humouredly by some of the swaggerers and roisterers of the village. It was remembered, they said, that he had been married only last November, and already had a son.

Nicolay, who was in liquor, swore that it was none of his doing, whereupon there was a burst of mockery and laughter all round. Horneck, still bent on his persistent search, had followed him again that night, and was at the door, hearing everything. Nicolay swore again, and because the company still laughed incredulously, he began to relate the true story of Millicent Heath word for word. When he mentioned the name of the late and terrific Lord Mompesson a dead silence filled the bar parlour. Horneck, still outside, thought it was the first time he had heard him speak the truth. The hollow-

voiced man went shrieking on inside, with his listeners all agog around him ; and when he stuck at his words, they helped him out with them.

As soon as he had finished his story the laughter grew apace again, and the gibes increased as the men discussed Millicent and old Heath and the long concealment of the joke. While a few, not as drunk as Nicolay, thought it might be just his drunken hoax, the majority were inclined to believe it. He was congratulated on the new way of securing a wife with a roof already above her head and an income in her pocket. But he was already too drunk to accept further congratulations. Besides, the bar windows were being shuttered up, and the door was already half bolted, so that it was time to be staggering home.

As he came on to the road that leads over the downs to North Bayton, escorted by the yells of laughter still coming from the other revellers, whose tipsy steps were carrying them in the opposite direction, Horneck was waiting for him in the moonlight. The doctor wondered, indeed, how he would get home that night unsupported, because his progress along the road was in a series of semicircles. Presently he left the road, and floundered on the grass with his lantern gone out. But he rose and staggered in the wrong direction towards the cliffs. A sharp night wind of spring was blowing in from the sea, and the waves were beating monotonously on the rocks below. Horneck, following Nicolay, caught him as he went tottering to the edge. He seemed to recognise the doctor's powerful grasp ; indeed, Horneck dragged him rather coarsely back, and pushed him forwards towards the road again.

‘ *You, doctor ! I didn't do it. I tell you Elshie . . .*

ajn't dead. Elshie's enjoyin' herself in a harem with a black chief. Thash what she's!"

Horneck encouraged him to talk, but Nicolay suddenly ceased speaking, or only muttered what Horneck could not understand.

'Speak, O villain, speak!' cried Horneck, shaking him like a rat on the road. 'Speak the infamy that is in you! Say what you did with her. It may be easier to find out the truth when you're drunk than when you're sober.'

Nicolay, without remonstrating, allowed himself to be thus severely handled by the huge doctor. But Horneck could get nothing out of him except monosyllabic exclamations of evident surprise at being shaken about in such a way, as if an embodied tempest were upon him. Indeed, the doctor had to drag him home and push him into his cottage. And then he went into his own, confessing to himself that his suspicions had not yet beaked their prey.

Next morning Nicolay's exposure of his wife was all over the parish. Its rapid diffusion was assured by the carrier's cart, which carried it with the butter, eggs and loaves from Eight Bells to Eastdown and back to Seadown. The wise minority who had suspected the truth now looked with pity on Mrs. Ashbee and her set, who had cat down the little tragedy within such sober limits, and had made it so innocent. No, no! Millicent had had high tantrums *before* she knew Nicolay. It was irritating to think that the district had actually been upset without knowing it. But the wise minority maintained that since the beginning *they* had seen the wheel within the wheel. Old Heath, like some blind deaf seer, had been chattering his woe to ears as deaf as his

own. He might as well have chattered it to the sea-waves at the foot of the cliffs, or to the winds of the downs.

One or two gossips now came to see him in his little house, which he had called Mill Cottage, in memory of the old mill. They questioned him vigorously, but his incoherence was rather baffling. Gossip, like art, lives on detail, but old Heath could give none. He only used bad language. And so, with the excuse of asking for Millicent, these gossips knocked at the door of Elsie Cottage, but not one of them got admittance. It was exasperating, because the burning questions were: Did her ladyship know? Did the Earl know? It was generally agreed that they did know. All eyes were turned to North Bayton. And now, only now, the significance of Porlock's action became apparent and vast. Had *he* actually known the sunk scandal? Ah, gossips, gossip to the end of time!

The truth was, that even if those vague rumours had never reached North Bayton, the Earl and his mother would sooner or later have stumbled on the actual truth. To begin with, Harold had not forgotten that Dr. Horneck had told him that he had been at the late lord's death-bed. And although certainly Harold could not as yet know the connection between such a fact and the presence of Nicolay on the estate, yet he had a curious presentiment that somehow the two things were related. He questioned Rewbell on the subject, but Rewbell only took the occasion, in his delicate way, to say that indeed the doctor from the beginning had pushed his way into places where he had no right with as much diligence as he had been showing ever since. Harold then thought of mentioning the thing to his

mother, but he desisted, since it would only involve another attack on Dr. Horneck and another scene between her and himself. He was not satisfied, however, and he began to question Rewbell more thoroughly on Nicolay, whom he disliked. He had asked the doctor about him; but since his questions had always brought on great violence and excitement in him, doubtless occasioned by the memory of his daughter's loss, the young Earl had ceased to mention his name. He had only informed Horneck that in future Nicolay must not come to the hunt; and Horneck had said he was certainly not surprised that his lordship detested him. But Harold began to think that perhaps, after all, his mother was right, and that Rewbell had taken too great a liberty in having foisted Nicolay on the estate. He regretted now that he had given permission for the erection of the cottage. Horneck's and old Heath's were all right, since the one was Harold's own affair, and the other was apparently his father's. But Nicolay seemed an objectionable person.

'By the way,' he said to Rewbell, 'who *is* that fellow? He is some friend of yours?'

Rewbell was astonished at his lordship's commanding tone. But he still remained loyal to his oath to the dead man.

'Nicolay? Yes, he is. Your lordship will find that Mr. Nicolay has been a most useful tenant.'

'Well, I don't like him, that's all!' said Harold with more authority in his voice than Rewbell had ever heard.

These hoverings on the verge of disillusion would soon cease, however. Rewbell felt that the time was near when his lordship would see that we must not expect

very high character in those who do for us very dirty work. In fact, almost simultaneously with the birth of Millicent's son came the rude truth of its fatherhood, and the young Earl and his mother heard it in the least agreeable way.

It happened in this manner: The tablet which Harold had erected in Porlock's church to the memory of his father was about to be unveiled. Nothing he could ever do could give his mother greater pleasure, and she seemed to see in his undertaking the promise that, after all, he was a true Mompesson. Although he had spent large sums on horses and other follies, the erection of the monument had involved some self-denial, because it had meant a few hundreds taken out of the purse of his pleasures. She rejoiced, therefore, in this reverence for his father, because it seemed to show that the spirit of his ancestors was really in him, and that sooner or later he would live his own life, and shake off the insidious stranger who had laid waste his faith. She encouraged him in the project, and won him back by all sorts of maternal artifice. Moreover, it was a great pleasure to superintend the progress of the work, and to speak to Porlock about it.

She told Porlock that she had good faith that their prayers were being answered, and that their energies should be redoubled. Porlock, however, felt that the tablet was going to be a most embarrassing affair. Doubtless Harold intended that it should be full of eulogies of his father, but how could Porlock, knowing, as he did, some of the damning facts of the late Earl's life, accept a monument, as a gift for the church, that was to be covered and sculptured with lies? It gave him many hours of anxious thought. The monument

was complete, and only the epitaph required to be chiselled, and the final polishing to be given to the marble. It was an erection placed against the middle of the north wall, from which some of the old oak pews had been cut away to make room for it. Rising from the floor and reaching almost to the roof, it had an imposing appearance; indeed, Harold's generosity and filial devotion had made it altogether out of proportion to the late Earl's attainments. And Porlock was thoroughly vexed to see the boy's lavish enthusiasm on account of his late never-to-be-forgotten father.

As Horneck had whispered to the Vicar, only the Rabelaisian word 'horrific' deserved to be put on the tomb. Two massive marble pillars supported a canopy which the sculptor had designed as a resting-place for winged cherubs and angels. Below the canopy was a prominent bust of the Earl, which could be seen from every point within the church, while a central slab of white marble was to contain the inscription. Porlock, displaying a finer wit than Horneck expected, proposed that the inscription should be in Latin, and offered to compose it or translate whatever Harold chose to insert.

But Harold said, no, indeed! it was to be in the vernacular, in order that the people might understand it. He would not object if a line he had learned out of Horace were added, such as 'Integer vitæ scelerisque purus,' but the bulk of the wording was to be in English. And Lady Mompesson agreed.

Harold asked Horneck's advice, but the doctor rather surprised him by saying that the world had evidently agreed that the place where lies might be told with impunity was a tombstone. In fact, he said, after having gone through a cemetery, the natural question to ask

was, For whom was Hell made? since only saints seem to have left the earth. And the doctor still further mystified Harold by saying, with apparent irrelevance, that he sometimes thought the best way for a thinker to treat mankind is to write about them books like Rabelais', built of laughter.

Harold smiled vaguely, not quite conscious of the doctor's meaning. But when he urged his question again, Horneck advised him to write about his father as he had found him. For it is the mistake of preachers and small moralists, he said, to suppose that a man is altogether bad because he has given way to a momentary passion. Small moralists are like useful gnats picking up the small vermin suited to them, but taken in themselves they are a very buzzing and irritating lot. Well, then, Harold composed the inscription, which was as follows:

RAISED TO THE MEMORY  
OF  
VINCENT, SIXTH EARL OF MOMPESON,  
BARON OF BAYTON,  
JUSTICE OF THE PEACE,  
WHO WAS BELOVED BY HIS TENANTRY  
ON ACCOUNT OF  
THE GOODNESS AND PURITY OF HIS LIFE  
AND HIS VIRTUOUS EXAMPLE,  
BY  
HAROLD, SEVENTH EARL OF MOMPESON,  
BARON OF BAYTON,  
HIS GRATEFUL SON.

Porlock watched the stonemason chiselling these pious falsehoods one by one. He could not bring himself to tell rude truth to the young Earl and his mother, but he knew that he was in a shockingly embarrassed position. After the stonemason's work was complete, he felt that he ought to have stayed his hand before it had been begun, but now it was too late, and he could only stare up at these filial exaggerations with a kind of pity and excitement.

Harold was to unveil the monument one Saturday afternoon in presence of the congregation and his own tenants specially assembled for the ceremony. And Lady Mompesson felt that after he had done it he would certainly begin to go to Church again. His father's bust would beckon him back to the ancient Mompesson pew. The day came, and the church was quite full when Harold and his mother entered. Mrs. Porlock, Muriel and Marjorie, were in the Vicar's pew, and Rewbell, Wharton and Nicolay had found seats among the North Bayton tenantry. Horneck had abstained from coming. But Eight Bells was well represented, and people had come all the way from Eastdown and Seadown. Everyone looked towards the monument, which, however, was meanwhile concealed by a curtain. Even old Heath had come. He had heard about the ceremony, and was so indignant that he determined to interrupt it. Indeed, when he entered unexpectedly there was quite a stir. He came in leaning heavily on his stick, and looked almost venerable, with his mass of silvery white hair. Room was made for him, and he sat down with his eyes on the floor. Some of the wags hoped he would make a scene. Indeed, there was already a feeling of intense, although

suppressed, excitement in the audience, because it was the first time that Harold and his mother had appeared in public since it had become known that there was, after all, a dark stain on the name of Mompesson.

Porlock, who had seen old Heath enter, and had watched his firmly-shut mouth and dogged look, was visibly alarmed. But presently the young Earl rose, and in a few words presented the monument in his own name and his mother's, saying that he hoped it would add new beauty to the church and serve to perpetuate his father's memory. Then he pulled the cord, and the curtain fell back so that everyone could see the handsome structure, together with the inscription and the late Earl's bust.

There was a slight sensation visible in the audience as each one looked at the bust and seemed to see the old Earl come to life among them again. But before Porlock had time to rise, old Heath was on his feet, and was shaking his stick at the bust which was so life-like, he thought.

'*You!*' cried the old miller in his undying hate, 'as made my da'ter Millicent a harlot, beän't worthy of a moniment. You woän't . . .'

'Samuel!' cried Porlock, amid the ensuing confusion, 'sit down.'

But old Heath sternly waved him back, and asked if he could tell a lie—*he*, the Vicar? Murmurs of approval broke from many of the pews, while the miller proceeded to curse publicly the House of Mompesson. Meantime, Lady Mompesson had fainted in her pew, while Harold's face was pale and excited as he supported her. As the *Eastdown Chronicle* said next day, it was 'an unprecedented occurrence.' The Vicar, how-

ever, maintained sufficient authority to cause the people to retire, although, once they were outside they surrounded old Heath, who gesticulated among them for some time.

Porlock, Harold, and Rewbell succeeded in taking Lady Mompesson into the vestry, and when she had recovered it was the Vicar's and Rewbell's painful duty to explain and corroborate everything. Harold, stupefied, looked first at his mother and then at his old tutor, and finally at Rewbell. The horrible truth refused at first to enter his generous and pure young soul. His impulse was to hurl his father's bust from its place, and tear the lying tablet down. But he already felt grieved for his mother, whose face, like his own, betrayed scorn and shame and pride all at once. She had enough presence of mind, however, and nobility of character, to call Rewbell to her and whisper to him, asking if he would forgive all her ungenerous doubts of him. And when he said, 'Yes, indeed!' she whispered again that perhaps it would have been kinder to have told her the truth from the beginning. Finally, after the crowd had dispersed, Harold and his mother drove in silence to North Bayton.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE DROPPED SPUR

AFTER Lady Mompesson had recovered from the first shock, she found that this shame was, strangely enough, the means of bringing herself and Harold more closely together again. The curious series of suspicions, misunderstandings, and ill-will which had reigned at North Bayton for months was at last dissipated, and it was seen that it had been the hand of the dead Earl which had been so lifted against the peace of his own house. For, indeed, there are some among the dead who refuse to be buried, but still harass the living, while their sins ferment in the quarrels they leave.

Thus, Lady Mompesson felt that she could never recompense Rewbell for the doubts she had openly expressed about his character, and the slanders these doubts had implied. It was now seen that, far from having been disloyal to the House of Mompesson, he had only been too loyal, and had risked his reputation for its sake. Porlock was there to emphasize the fact. Rewbell, however, smiling inwardly, rather rejoiced in these broils and their successful issue. And he was very delighted when the young Earl came to him in the old open-hearted way and called him Edwin again, and

said he had been a good chap. Rewbell, smiling and shaking hands with his master, said 'Not at all!' and that the thing dearest to his heart was certainly the stainlessness of the Mompesson name, and that he was just wondering if anything could be done to wash it white again.

If Harold had been able to read the eyes of the dexterous man at that moment, doubtless he would have seen glances of satire directed against himself, and some elusive questionings connected with a certain Harriet. But Harold was in dead ignorance of Rewbell's meaning, and was only desirous to hear his proposals. These were that Nicolay, Millicent, and old Heath should be removed, if possible, from their cottages, in order that such living witnesses of North Bayton's humiliation should no longer be allowed to triumph at North Bayton's gates. And Rewbell told his lordship that the reason why, in fulfilment of the wishes of Harold's shocking father, he had proposed that the cottages should be built on these sites was that there were no other sites convenient. Had he built them safe out of view of the castle, the expense would have been greater, because deeper foundations would require to have been dug. As it was, the cottages, including Dr. Horneck's, which, Rewbell reminded him, had been his own affair, had been run up at no great cost. The chief business was how to bundle all these people out, and Rewbell would be very glad indeed if Dr. Horneck could be bundled out along with them. This, however, seemed unlikely, and he dared not discuss it. Meantime, he pointed out that it was not an affair of leases. Neither Millicent nor old Heath had rights to any particular cottage, but were to be provided only with a cottage,

or a sum equivalent. So that it was in his lordship's power to do very much what he pleased with them.

Certainly Harold shared both Rewbell's opinion and his mother's desire that at least Millicent and Nicolay should be asked to leave North Bayton. Otherwise neither he nor his mother could well remain. Indeed, in any case Lady Mompesson proposed to go to London or spend some time abroad, and she was very desirous for more reasons than one to persuade Harold to accompany her. She suggested that they should take Lord Mowhurst's advice, but Rewbell told her that his lordship knew all about the affair already. At any rate, Harold, although he was thoroughly shocked, and although he could hardly look any of his tenants in the face, determined to wipe out the memory of these things as far as possible.

Luckily the hunting season was over, and he did not require to meet any of the notabilities of the district while his cheek was still burning with shame. He decided, therefore, quietly to restore the dignity of his house, and to make any reparations in his power. The first thing to do was to provide for Millicent and old Heath elsewhere. Both his mother and himself must be spared any further humiliation. As it was, Eight Bells was glutted with gossip.

And one thing at least was certain, that so long as the monument remained where it was not even Lady Mompesson could persuade herself to go to church. Harold complained bitterly against Porlock, who if he had so chosen might have prevented the deplorable fiasco. When Porlock pointed out that, if he had spent months hesitating what course he should adopt, it was for the sake of not hurting his lordship's own feelings,

Harold replied that, while it was very likely true, he could not help thinking that it was also very cowardly.

At any rate, Harold gave orders for the instant removal of the accursed memorial, since he had no wish to let his name be any longer a laughing-stock to the parish. So that, legal permission having been obtained, masons were set to work at once, and the débris, together with the cherubs and the late Earl's bust, were brought to North Bayton and flung into an outhouse. Lady Mompesson found herself in the extraordinary situation of actually approving all these dilapidations and the implied insults to her husband's memory. Weeks had to pass before she could bring herself thoroughly to believe in these Rabelaisian episodes of his career, so successfully screened.

It was heart-breaking to be the dupe of one's own piety. It was heart-breaking to observe that Harold seemed to feel as if he had been outraged by having had such a father at all. And it came to be a question whether North Bayton could continue to be the family seat. But at least she could afford to rejoice in the new tenderness Harold was showing her. Only, would it last? Was there not another subject on which she hardly ventured to think? Was it to be true, as Rewbell had predicted, that there would be a twist in *all* the Mompessons? Did the new rumours which had begun to disturb the district, and had been already brought to her own ears by the sleepless Rewbell, not seem to foretell that the son might be only a new edition of the father? In short, was it true that he had been making love to the blind girl, and had been seen kissing her near the lonely cliffs?

These were the new torments. She looked at him

now and again as mothers look at their sons to find out by their faces if their manhood is still unsullied. She dared not question him now. He was absolute master at North Bayton, and she had done disputing it. But she still hoped to hold him, high-spirited, reckless, generous, unbelieving as he was, by some invisible chains and bonds of maternal cunning. And—strange irony!—she was more thankful the louder grew his denunciations of the blot on the name of Mompesson, since they seemed to promise that in him the name would be redeemed.

But Harold was cursing his father's sin chiefly because he was afraid that perhaps Harriet already knew of it. Once more he was almost glad that she was blind; otherwise she might have come to the church that day and seen his humiliation. But doubtless by this time she had heard the tale which had upset all Eight Bells, and that had travelled in a few days all over Sussex and beyond it. He came down to Twilight Cottage partly to find out if she knew, and partly to ask Horneck's advice.

Horneck received him with the usual gay smile which, perhaps, only Harold used to see on his face, and that made him feel that the doctor was the only man he ever really knew and loved. He saw that something was troubling Harold, and he took him by the hand, and they sat down on the sofa together. Presently he looked into the boy's eyes, and saw tears in them—manly tears of shame and pride.

'Doctor,' the boy faltered, 'you have heard. . . . You are the only friend I have in the world.'

'Yes, my lord, I have heard. I knew months ago, you know,' said Horneck. •

'You knew too! Oh, why didn't you tell me, then?'

'I promised Mr. Porlock.'

'Oh, that old fool!' exclaimed Harold.

'Besides, I was a stranger. How could I have dared?'

Harold, seeing the point, admitted it, and then said that he would feel abashed for life.

'No, no!' said Horneck, rallying him; '*you* abashed! Not a bit of you. You have your own life to live—your own gay life; and although it seems a strange thing to say, there is nothing more important than to know the sins of your parents. Sometimes just a little knowledge helps us to reject these horrors that are handed down to us, and to keep throwing off hereditary poison. Sin is such a carnivorous thing. You will know never to repeat *his* mistake. The unrest of sex is the most extraordinary thing the student of human nature can examine.'

Harold looked into his deep eyes, which seemed to be studded all over with points of light.

'You see,' continued Horneck, 'although I do not believe the will is free—few accurate thinkers ever did, certainly not Spinoza—I believe it may be made as strong as any muscle. It is the main muscle of our spiritual life, and it is dreadful to see the will expiring in passion. We must develop the militarism of the human will, and make it a kind of aide-de-camp to the brain. But I am not alarmed by the spectacle of human folly and sin, no more than I am alarmed by the spectacle of bodily disease. We are not atheists, you and I, in spite of what they say.' And here Horneck smiled. 'Atheism is simply an empty house. We believe, don't we, that in the end God is our rendezvous? We all vanish in God? Meantime, we notice

the two strivings, the up and the down. We are like plants, are we not? whose roots struggle down into the foul, dark earth, but whose heads struggle into the air. Let us not shriek over our nature. Let us go on with our psychological weeding! Most men are idealists either in early youth or on their death-beds, but you and I are going to be idealists every hour, Harold. How dare I call your lordship Harold!'

'Do, do!' said Harold, smiling; 'it's what I wish. But, doctor, don't . . . don't tell your niece about . . . about father.'

'No, no—never!' said Horneck. 'I have never told her a word.'

'I knew you would behave like that,' said Harold, relieved, but little knowing that Rewbell had already poisoned her with it all.

'No, my dear boy; I hate gossip,' replied the doctor. 'The only things I can remember are ideas. Ordinary human life is a huddle of trivialities, which are interesting only to the imbeciles who write popular novels.'

'Well, then, doctor, I wish to tell you,' said Harold, 'that, for the sake of my mother, I intend to clear your neighbours out. We are going to give them money if they will leave the place altogether. You can understand how it is utterly impossible for us to continue to see these people at our very doors.'

'Nicolay to go away!' exclaimed the doctor, while the expression of his face changed.

In fact, Rewbell had already sounded Nicolay on the subject, and the man was thoroughly overjoyed at the prospect of an early escape from Horneck; and when Millicent knew that her name was now a byword at Eight Bells, she also was glad to depart. But Harold

was astonished when the doctor told him that if Nicolay went *he* would go too ; and, of course, if the doctor went, Harriet could not remain.

Harold paused and looked at Horneck, and noticed that his face had the same troubled look he had seen that afternoon when he and the doctor had stood at the gate of Twilight Cottage, and had watched Nicolay run like a rat to its hole ; and when Harold asked why the doctor was always so determined to live beside Nicolay, Horneck explained everything.

'Yes, yes,' he said, with increasing excitement, 'if that man goes, I will go. He is waiting to escape from me. I shall never give up the search till I am convinced of the truth.'

He displayed such passion in these utterances that at first Harold thought he was labouring under some hallucinations.

'But,' continued Horneck, 'could you expect anything good of such a dog as that, who for the sake of your father's money made Millicent his second wife ?'

So that there were at least one sin and one sinner in the world upon which and upon whom the doctor could not look with philosophic composure.

'Wherever he goes I shall go, your lordship, even although your lordship refused to free me from the lease of this cottage. I shall bring that man to judgment yet, even although I were to lose everything in the attempt. And all that I ask is to be warned in time. Do not let him escape without my knowledge. He will rush away some midnight,' said Horneck in the greatest agitation in which Harold had ever seen him.

'Doctor,' said Harold, 'you know very well that I could never see you go away.'

'Oh, I must, your lordship! I certainly must!'

After Harold had heard everything, and had joined in these suspicions and denunciations of Nicolay, he said that, come what might, he could never part from the doctor. Some new plan would require to be devised, and it was curious to hear Horneck asking him to promise that, whatever the decision, he would be advised in time.

Harold came away determined that, if the eviction of the tenants of Elsie Cottage meant the eviction of those at Twilight, no such thing would happen. Lady Mompesson, therefore, was surprised when he suddenly changed front and said that for the present Nicolay was to remain. When she asked what he meant, he told her that Dr. Horneck had pointed out that each man's life was his own, untouched by the shame which had overtaken the life and character of any other. What did the jabberings of a few country clowns matter to *him*? Nothing at all. And when his mother insisted that, at least, Elsie Cottage and Mill Cottage should be demolished, he said that doubtless it would happen later on.

But if Lady Mompesson was surprised at this change, Rewbell certainly was not. He knew all about it. And when he told her it was because if Nicolay went Horneck would go, and take his niece with him, that the young lord had decided to endure these disgraces, she asked feebly if Providence had any other rod in pickle. The fact was that Rewbell, with his mad love for Harriet still raging in him, would have been as unhappy at her departure as the Earl himself. He had not reckoned that Nicolay's departure would mean Horneck's as well, and although certainly he did not love Horneck, he loved Harriet, and meant to pursue her. He meant to save her from the young Earl, to intercede for her as he

had never interceded for Millicent! So that the centre of excitement was shifted to Twilight Cottage, although perhaps the shrewd reader sees that it was never anywhere else.

Now, who supposes that in the midst of these troubles Harold had forgotten Harriet for a moment? By many signs, too numerous to mention, but which he counted up in his heart, he had seen that she had forgiven him. One day he came to Twilight Cottage when the doctor had gone to look after a case at Eastdown. Harriet was in the little study when he entered. She was now able to recognise his step, and when she heard it on the gravel walk she knew who was coming. She rose to meet him, and, after she had said good-morning, told him that her uncle had left an hour ago. It was the first time he felt slightly pleased that the doctor was not there to meet him, for he had come that morning determined at all hazards to see Harriet. And in a few moments, blind though she was, she seemed to have detected his real quest. There was the same emotional tone in his voice which she had heard that day at the cliffs, even above the noise of the sea. What is he like? she wondered—this impassioned youth, hidden from her by dark cruel veils of sightlessness. The thrill of his kiss was not yet spent. In spite of all that Rewbell had whispered to her against him, the kiss had wakened in her some wild answering chords and the entombed poetry of her soul.

Almost never a day passed but she heard Horneck speaking with enthusiasm of the young lord, and who could know him better than he? The world, she had been told, was full of craft and guile, and she seemed to see it far off like some dim blurred Armageddon of

intermixed hostile passions and deceits. How was she to distinguish the false from the true? Those two youths had expressed some sudden amazing passion for her. She heard their voices struggling to express it. Both had taken advantage of her helplessness. But was there no clue to find out which of them was noble and which base? Mankind must be terrible! she thought. She had felt the soft pressure of Harold's lips and the fierce kiss of the hard lips of Rewbell. Moreover, the servant had maligned the master, and had warned her of the fate of Millicent. And yet, though troubled by these quickening fears, she had never asked Horneck why he had not told her who their neighbours were. It was a proof of his delicacy and of his loyalty to Harold, maybe. If so, did it not mean that his respect for Harold was so great that he must be silent even to his niece on the matter of the young Earl's shame?

By these subtle ways she tried to penetrate in dim gropings into the character of her lover. But not even Horneck must know this curious disturbance which had entered her life. Why, indeed, should a son have to hang his head because of his father's guilt?

'He is very noble,' Horneck said when once she questioned him evasively. 'He is not surprisingly intelligent. By no means. But he has a thoroughly good heart. If you could see his face, Harriet, you would understand, for the face is nothing but the soul's magic glass, where a character's past and future seem to meet together.'

If she could see his face!

But the cries of Millicent in her hour of trial had sounded strangely in the blind girl's ears. Were these

the shrill curses on the name of Mompesson?—love's gall? And when Horneck had run out to help her, Harriet had stood wondering on these enigmas of human love. Were the supreme facts in life, then, only pleasure and pain, the two millstones between which the human soul is crushed? Oh, if she could only *see*, how many enigmas would become plain! Truth, she thought, or at least the possibility of discovering it, lies with those who have sight. How easy it must be for them, she said, to choose between right and wrong! But what strange intellectual and moral confusion was the heritage of those mutilated like herself, blind from their birth! And, indeed, did ethics not begin with the first blush on the human face? Is it not just his eye-sight which has made man conscious of shame, since the eye instinctively closes at any vicious spectacle? And how vastly different would our theory of vice and of virtue be supposing we had no eyes to see the results of the one or the other!

As Harriet began to know herself, she guessed that except for her imperfect vision she must be of like passions with other human beings. What was this strange dim struggle within her towards some opposite to herself? Nay, think what these terrors of love must mean to a being to whom the lust of the eye has been denied. What is left except some weird amazing task of primeval instinct, rudimentary gropings, searchings, and clingings to dreamt objects of adoration? Here surely Nature had devised some tragic satire on morality. It is the task of the blind to remain impassive, but Harriet was filled with restlessness ever since she had felt his lordship's kiss. And since Horneck continued to speak of him with admiration, she was driven to

struggle nearer and nearer to him. She listened for his footstep. She could hardly control herself when she heard it. One day, after Horneck had been talking about him, he said :

'Come, Harriet, let me see if your eyes are making any progress. Here is his lordship's photograph.' Can you make anything of it ?'

She took it, while her hands trembled, and held it up before her eyes, but, after having looked long at it, said she could see nothing. And many a time afterwards she took it up, struggling to have one dim glimpse. She began to question Horneck about Rewbell.

'He is a nimble, subtle man,' said Horneck—'the kind of man who might never be detected in a single error, but whose whole life might be full of the most careful sophistry. A walker over slippery things. I hardly like him. He is a friend of . . . of that man next door ! There are some men never detected because their sins are made up of one vast consistency.'

It was enough for Harriet. Rewbell was a liar ! His accents, his words, fitted the doctor's description. Finally, when she was told that Harold, still afraid lest she might wander too far over the downs towards the cliff-heads, or even encounter some mishap when walking on the roads, had ordered one of his servants to follow her at a little distance, she was touched by his goodness and convinced of it. Harold had not even told Horneck of this measure, but when it became known at Eight Bells it caused much amusement. It was a sign, to be sure, to enlighten all who doubted that the Earl *was* in love with the doctor's blind niece. On the whole, the new brew promises to be as bitter as the old.

Well, then, when Harold came in that morning to her,

both he and she were too conscious of the pain they were causing each other. But the pain of doubt would soon disappear. He had brought her hyacinths and red roses.

'It is nothing but kindness from you, my lord, every day,' she said, with a new tremor in her voice, as she lifted the flowers.

'I would do anything to help you to forget that day I made you . . . made you so vexed with me,' he said.

But her smile showed that, if she had been vexed that day, she was not vexed now.

'I understand, my lord,' she said.

'Oh, *do* you forgive me, then?' he cried.

'As if your lordship requires forgiveness from a poor little blind girl like me!' Harriet exclaimed, and then laughed quite merrily. 'If there was anything to forgive, it is forgiven.'

'Oh, then,' he said, 'will you believe that what I said then was true, and is true yet?'

She lifted her head into the light so that he could see its pure lines, and the look, half of suffering and half of the promises of joy, on her face.

'I am blind!' she exclaimed, and burst into tears.

'Harriet, Harriet!' he said, 'will you let me come near you? Will you let me take your hand *this* time? Will you let me explain, Harriet?'

She reached her hand towards him, and he took it and kissed it.

'Oh, Harriet,' said the radiant boy, 'I never was so happy—*never!*'

'Your lordship——' she began.

'Don't call me "lordship"; never do it again, Harriet,' he said.

'But how can I make you happy? How is it

possible?' she asked, turning her face to the light again where he stood, 'I admit—yes, I admit I have had dreams gorgeous and deluding.'

'Harriet darling, never say it!'

'What can I be to you? Worlds are separating us. What cruel power has brought us together only to sunder us?'

'Harriet, you must not believe it. Never, darling; you must believe *me* this time.'

'Yes, yes, how can I doubt you?' she said, as he took her and kissed her unrepulsed.

'Harriet, are you actually mine—oh, *mine*—Harriet?'

'Ah! are you sure,' she said, 'that this is love? Is it not pity?'

'No, Harriet, never. You are mine, and mine only. If there is anyone to pity, it is myself without you.'

'Think of what my uncle will say. I am afraid of him. He will separate us.'

'Let us say nothing for the present, then,' said Harold.

'They would all think you mad!' she exclaimed.

'They have nothing to do with me—nothing, Harriet.'

'I tell you my uncle would hurry me away, and then I would not find you.'

'And then I would follow you to the ends of the earth, Harriet!'

'Ah, but I am so helpless!'

'I am here to help you.'

'What would the Countess say? I fear the world. Ah, I am almost glad that I cannot see their faces! How cruel they must be!'

'Harriet, you are adorable,' said the boy, kissing her passionately and toying with her hair—'just adorable!'

'The first day I heard you I saw your shadow in the sun. Your voice sounded as clear as a bell.'

Suddenly they heard a noise of wheels, and then Horneck drove up at the gate and alighted. Harold kissed her once more unseen. She said, hurriedly, that her uncle would be at Eastdown next day at the same hour. Harold, pressing her hand, said he would come for her, and then went out to meet the doctor.

'Doctor,' he said, 'I have been waiting for you all morning, but I must go now.'

'I am so sorry, your lordship. Word should have been left,' said Horneck, and then, pointing to Nicolay's cottage, asked if any decision had yet been made.

'They shall remain there for the present,' said Harold, and then, shaking the doctor's hand affectionately, left him for North Bayton, while Horneck, muttering that that was all right, went into Twilight Cottage.

Next day Harold at the appointed hour walked down to the cottage. He was in his riding suit—white drill breeches, riding boots, and chained spurs. Wharton was to have the roan ready on his return. It was a warm morning in the first week of May, a most glorious scene for any lover. And although Harold had hardly slept all night he came down fresh and radiant.

When he arrived at the gate, he knew that the doctor had already left for Eastdown, because on the dewy road there were marks where the gig had been turned. It can hardly be said that poor Harriet was *looking* out for him as any other girl would have been looking out for her lover; but at any rate she was listening for him, and her heart was beating as it had never beat before. She had kissed his photograph twenty times, because she knew where it lay on the mantelshelf. Never had any day of

her life been like this day. If women, even with all the gifts of sight, idealize and glorify their lovers beyond their deserts, what gorgeous dream of him had not Harriet dreamed? His step—his step . . . could there be any music more wonderful than that, except his voice? He was hers to cling to, if not to *see*. ‘Oh, “Harold, Harold!” she had been whispering all night. ‘Is this love? Is this at last the mystery and torment of it?’ . . . And their ocean dawn rose that morning, although she could not see it—rose from the roots of light which seemed to come from under the sea. But *he* had seen it like a gold tempest in the east. And the sea under the hushed winds—yes, he, too, was calling them in his raiment, which seemed woven of stars!

O North Wind, fly to South,  
And find the mead its flowers,  
And breathe, immortal mouth  
Of Love, immortal hours !

O East Wind, fly to West,  
And blow my roses red !  
And sleep and wake, love, lo,  
As in soft roses' bed !

He did not ride that day. In the afternoon he took her to the lonely cliffs, and as they went over the green downs surely these were a kind of Elysian Fields! There was a little creek he knew well at the foot of the cliffs, about two and a half miles from North Bayton. A stairway had been cut in the rocks, so that descent was easy. The shore below was shingle, and it was here that Harold used to bathe on summer mornings. In a little haven, protected from the fiercer surge of the waves, he kept two boats. The rocks were smooth and full of hollows, and at the cliff-base there was a cave which

during high winter or spring tides used to be full of the sea, but in summer was left empty and dry. It was called in jest The Lovers' Refuge, because many a Romeo and Juliet of Eight Bells had vowed vows within it. Thither Harold brought Harriet after he had led her carefully down the rocky stair. There no whispers could trouble them except the whispers of the sea knocking mysteriously for ever at the worn doors of Earth. Harold meant to kiss her all the sunshine of that day. Here he made her throne.

'Darling,' he said to her in that tremulous utterance of first love when his speech is full, 'I would give all the world for you!'

'I now know,' said the blind girl, clinging to him, 'that it is not in *seeing*, but in *feeling*, that all glory stands.'

'Harriet, can't you see the sea? We're quite near it. It is shining like a spread fire.'

'I see only glimmerings, or what I have been told are glimmerings, like a dream on fire, Harold.'

'Oh, Harriet, it is a perfectly gorgeous day, but you're the most gorgeous thing in it!'

'How hot the sun is, even in this cave!' she said, as he kissed her mouth. 'Am I not going to be a terrible burden to you?'

'No, no, never, Harriet! Don't think it. Please never say it again.'

And then, as lovers do, they began to ask each other if they had ever been in love before.

'Yes,' she said, 'but with me it has been a struggle through darkness all on my own side.'

'Well, then, Harriet, they all said I was to marry my cousin Adelaide,' he replied, while she quivered, 'just

because we have known each other since we were children. But it's only their talk. I have never loved anyone but you.'

'I believe you, Harold—I believe you utterly.'

As he moved forward to shield her from the too fierce sun, his left spur came unloose, and she heard it jingle, and picked it up and felt the cold metal.

'It's one of my spurs. I was to go riding to-day,' he said, smiling.

'Won't you give it to me, Harold?' she asked.

He laughed, and said he would give her many things better than that.

'No, but I wish it. A spur! Does this hurt the poor horse?'

'No, not at all. It's quite blunt. Feel it.'

And he took one of her fingers and allowed it to run over the little wheel.

'Give me it, then, Harold. It's a symbol,' she said, and took the spur and kissed it.

'Darling!' he exclaimed. 'As if you are anything but my queen!'

'No, no, I must be an inferior being. I am blind!'

'But you shall *see* yet,' he said. 'We shall go to Wiesbaden or Breslau, where the doctor says there are great oculists. They will give you sight.'

'Oh, Harold, I warn you,' she said in alarm, 'never expect it. My uncle says he now thinks it can never be. And then you will grow tired of me. You will be disappointed. You will feel me a burden, as I said. Harold, I do not wish to see now. Let me cling to you. Let me be your little blind maid.'

'Darling!' he exclaimed, 'you are right. You are perfect as you are.'

'Ah, but I am afraid. The Countess is proud, they tell me. How could she receive me?'

'It matters nothing, nothing, nothing! Harriet, you shall be *my* Countess.'

'Oh, but there will be such difficulties! I can guess at them already. I shall overturn your home. I shall drive your mother out.'

'Harriet, please never say it—never! I shall love you till all the stars are black!' he cried.

And now she knew love, and stood in the tremblings of his conquest. No one could separate them any more. But it was time to be going, for the long summer day was turning dim, and Horneck would very likely be back, and be wondering where she was. Indeed, he was looking out anxiously, and as he saw Harold and Harriet coming over the downs, he came running to meet them.

'Oh, doctor,' said Harold, 'we have been having a walk.'

'Ah, I am glad you have come back,' said Horneck, looking curiously at them both, and noticing that Harriet's face was flushed. 'I thought some mishap had overtaken Harriet.'

He then asked the Earl if he would come in, but Harold said no, he would come next morning, and that he would require to hurry back to North Bayton to dress for dinner. And so they parted.

Harriet and the doctor went into Twilight Cottage together, and shortly after a very curious spectacle met Horneck's eyes. For Harriet, thinking he had left the room, while, as a matter of fact, he was only sitting very quietly on one of the chairs, began kissing Harold's spur very passionately. He could hardly believe his

eyes, indeed, when he observed Harriet put the silver spur against her lips, but presently he recognised it to be one of the young Earl's. Although he knew that all lovers pass through that first fierce stage of fetishism, when anything the least trivial which the beloved has handled or worn becomes momentarily sacred, he was hardly prepared to know that the Earl was her lover.

'Harriet, my dear,' he said, 'what is this?'

'Oh!' she exclaimed, startled by his voice. 'Oh, I never knew you were here. . . . It is . . . it is cruel of you, uncle, to spy on me!'

'My dear child,' he said, coming up to her, 'you are mistaken in this object. How did you get hold of this? This is his lordship's spur!'

She held it firmly as he tried to take it from her.

'Harriet!' he said, astonished. 'It's *I* who have been blind! When did this begin?'

'To-day,' she said, weeping, and imploring him not to be cruel, but to leave her alone. 'Oh, what it is to be blind!'

'Harriet,' said Horneck, thoroughly perturbed, 'this is incredible. This is an extraordinary fact!'

'Uncle,' she said, with her voice full of the stress of emotion, 'I tell you he loves me. I have known it long. Are you going to persecute me? Are you going to dare to separate us just because I am blind? He will hate you if you dare. Oh, I shall flee to him! Oh, if I had eyes—eyes!'

'Harriet,' said Horneck, attempting with great difficulty to quieten himself, 'I do not know what to say or think. I have been taken completely by surprise. And I see . . . I see great troubles ahead. I respect the young Earl—yes, I love him. But young men are . . .

young men. One never knows. Oh, Harriet, how can this be ?'

' How dare you suspect, uncle ? You have taught him everything. Your influence over him has been enormous. You have told me what you think of him. He is practically your pupil. He will act nobly just because you have taught him to.'

' Ah, my God !' exclaimed Horneck.

' We are to be married, I tell you. I am to be his blind wife.'

' *You !* Never, Harriet ! I say never, and I am your guardian. It shall never be imputed to me that I dealt this blow to the House of Mompesson,' said the doctor, aware of a hundred perils and disasters now leaping to sight.

' Oh, the cruelty ! Oh, if I could only *see !*' cried Harriet fiercely at him, and moving through the room. ' You will be putting him against me, all of you ! All of you against me, one poor blind lover !'

' Hush, Harriet !' said the doctor ; ' calm yourself. This is a dreadful passion.'

' Oh, but I won't ! but I won't !' cried Harriet still more loudly. ' Oh, my Harold !'

' Well then, Harriet, give over for the present, poor child ! Never doubt me. I shall do nothing wrong —nothing whatever, my poor blind child !'

At this Harriet broke done in uncontrollable weeping.

' We shall see him in the morning,' said Horneck.

' Yes, *you* will see him ; *I* shall never, never see him !'

' Now, tell me, Harriet : what have you been doing all day ? Where have you been with him ?'

' We were down by the seashore, sitting in the sun all

day. And I have never known happiness till to-day. Uncle, can I trust you? Will you dare put him against me because I am blind?"

'Hush, poor child! hush!' said Horneck, but unprevailingly, so that he had to carry her crying bitterly to her room, and for safety lock the door on her.

And then he came down to his own room, where he sat for hours in consternation.

Meantime, at North Bayton Harold had told his mother that he was engaged to Dr. Horneck's niece. But these words produced such a violent hysteria in Lady Mompesson that he thought of summoning the doctor to her aid. In about a quarter of an hour, however, she grew better and calmer, and then Harold asked what was the matter. She asked him in turn if he was mad, or if it gave him any pleasure to complete her misery.

'Misery over what?' he asked.

And when she replied that, apart from the question of the girl's blindness, which unfitted her for marriage, and especially for marriage into a hereditary house, there was the question of her birth, Harold hotly rejoined that Harriet was not picked from the roadside, but was the grand-daughter of a Baronet. Lady Mompesson then said that she had no words to express her feelings about such a project, but that all her misgivings and bad dreams had now come true. The unbelieving doctor against whom she had warned him so often had at last completed his ruin. She felt convinced with Rewbell that her son was now wholly in his meshes, and that the monster would never be satisfied till he was reigning at North Bayton. This love-match was only part of a vast insidious scheme, she said. And she

preferred to believe it rather than believe that her son was going to be like his unutterable father.

Harold, thoroughly enraged, told his mother to cease her religious cant, and to pose no longer as a Christian. These were hard words, but he could not help blurting them out. He could stand it no longer, he said. She, the president of a Charitable Blind Society, who had taught him from the beginning to be specially kind to those poor creatures afflicted by God, was now in a state of fury because he had been so kind as to choose one of them to be his wife.

'That's a different thing,' she said.

'Oh, is it?'

And then he astonished her by saying that ever since he was a boy he had conceived a great affection for these blind girls whom she had brought year after year to North Bayton. Many of them were lovely, he said, and he used to dream about them. And his affection and pity for them now found utterance in his great love of Harriet.

'If I had known such a thing, not one of them would ever have come here!' said Lady Mompesson.

'Well, I tell you what it is,' said Harold: 'your usual May reception of them here shall not take place this year unless you are prepared to receive Harriet.'

Lady Mompesson had just issued invitations for her usual garden-party for the blind, who were always conveyed in a special train from London. The party was to take place the following week, but she had hardly counted on such a dilemma.

'No, Harold, I cannot,' she said—'I will not receive her. It would be madness. I dare not encourage you in such a project. Oh, you are mad!'

'Very well,' he said, 'not one blind person shall enter these grounds next week—not one! You shall put off your party. I shall not allow *my* house to be the scene of such cant and hypocrisy. And, what's more, you can . . . you can . . . Yes, yes . . . I say you *must* leave North Bayton! It's your own fault. You have driven me to it!'

He went out of the room, and left her in a state of great grief and collapse. And although his heart was burning, and although he would have liked to recall these dreadful words addressed to his mother, his anger, his outraged love for Harriet, kept him resolute. His life was his own, he said, and he would suffer no control of it.

He did not see his mother any more that night, and next morning he breakfasted alone, wondering if she was preparing to leave North Bayton for ever. Nay, he could hardly keep from running to ask her forgiveness, and to tell her it had only been a hot moment of ungovernable rage which had made him expel her from her home. But he hesitated, and his pride overcame him so that he did not see her. As a member of the Urban Council, he had to attend a meeting at Eastdown that day, but he meant first to spend an hour with the doctor. So he finished his breakfast, and went down to Twilight Cottage in expectation of seeing Harriet.

He and the doctor were still continuing their readings in the Moral Philosophies, and he wondered whether he should open his heart to Horneck without loss of time, or whether Horneck had already discovered traces of this amazing love-match. The doctor, indeed, had been tormented by doubts and misgivings all night, and he

seemed to meet Harold in the morning with a disaffected air. He was hoping that the boy would tell him everything. That would be the best sign. And yet how painful the issue would be if Horneck, after he had heard the outpourings of the boy's heart, met them, as he meant to do, with a defiant 'No'!

On the other hand, if Harold showed a desire to withhold this first love secret of his heart, how hazardous the affair might prove to be! As he sat down with him that morning, therefore, to study the basis of Morals and Conduct, he felt that many of the pale, unimpassioned gentlemen who write treatises on these subjects as if the human soul were a specimen of still life, and not the fiery, tempted thing that it is, should write their books only after they have felt the breath of its fire.

Well, then, Horneck was very earnest that day. He knew that the boy was now filled with love and unbelief—the two forces which contain all the moral tragedies of the world. And he began to look aghast on that half of the work which had been his own. For he asked himself uneasily if, after all, Porlock's old-fashioned view might not be correct? Horneck had been tearing up old roots, but had he planted new roots? The boy's untrained mind, his inability to accept rightly these doctrines beyond his grasp, might lead to moral confusion. And now he was in love, and in love with a blind girl! If he were thwarted? Yes, the consequences would doubtless be bad enough. But, on the other hand, supposing he were allowed to become Harriet's lover, to spend one after another of these gorgeous summer days with her, beside the lonely cliffs or in the vast shadowed gardens of North Bayton, what

strange fascination might not grow between them? Nay, Horneck was already wondering with a kind of terror whether yesterday had not added one other to Love's heaped dates of sin! It was by a curious chance that he had set that morning apart for explaining to Harold Spinoza's remarkable theory<sup>\*</sup> on the Toleration of Vice. Yes, my imbeciles, that great man did actually say ('Tractatus,' chap. xx.) that what cannot in Nature be abolished must be tolerated, even though it were a vice. For he saw that conduct and physiology are terribly connected—a truth wholly surprising, no doubt, to all kinds of emasculated vermin! I admit, however, that, although it was a truth which Horneck, being a doctor, accepted to the full, it perturbed him that day. He had pointed out to Harold that, judged purely by the intellect, evil does not exist. It is only negation, and nothing more, as Eckhart, Spinoza, and all other great people say.

But, alas! the immortal myth of Eden must be re-enacted in every soul. And Horneck, as he looked at the boy, wondered for what mysterious purpose the human face has been chosen to be the mirror of evil and of good. He put, therefore, an earnestness and vehemence into his utterances that morning which astonished Harold, and his eyes were fixed on him in a wholly unusual way. He seemed to beckon to him to tell him everything; but Harold hesitated, and said nothing. The scepticism with which Horneck had filled him, these vanishing lights of old faiths, Love's uproar within him, these great heats of the soul—what would all this do except multiply his temptations? Horneck, in a state of exasperation, knew that so long as any

secret kept thus rolling between them, unacknowledged on either side, all confidence would be lost.

'Well, then,' he said, 'we have to ask ourselves if even in the naturalistic view of the world sin still exists. It certainly does. It is a useful word for describing evil from the point of view of the emotions. The intellect *explains* things, but shrieks over nothing, and admires the laws of disease as much as the laws of health. But man is a creature of adorations, Harold. Even idolatry, you know, was a rude kind of idealism. I am convinced that idealism is necessary. I could not live one day without it, and I wish *you*, too, to be convinced of it. The human soul becomes so easily a nucleus of horror. I have seen vice like a fissure running through a man's life and character, splitting them up. Just because it overturns a man physically and intellectually, it must be trampled on, don't you see. I have looked into the waste and ghastly places of the human soul, I have studied every crime; and as a result I am that impossible person, materialist and idealist in one. I have seen a man struggling long against his own nature, and getting no credit from the world—fighting, if I might so say, his own physiology, unaware of the real causes that were moving him—until suddenly one day the truth burst forth in him like a flame, and the last state of that man was worse than the first.'

With many more strange and passionate utterances such as these did Horneck bewilder the boy that day. But if there was any confession to be made, he waited in vain to hear it. Harold did not even ask for Harriet, but when he came away, thinking that the doctor had not been quite as persuasive as usual, he lingered on the *s*, as if expecting to see his Harriet. Yesterday's

excitement, however, had made her ill, and Horneck had compelled her to stay in one of the back-rooms. Harold therefore left without having seen her, while the doctor remained in the room in pained suspense and doubt.

That afternoon, while Harold was at Eastdown, Rewbell went to Twilight Cottage. He had been sent by Lady Mompesson to beseech the doctor to remove his niece at once. It was the kind of mission which pleased Rewbell. He had seen very little of Horneck during all those months; indeed, he had no wish to see him, except at a distance, perhaps, when Harold and the doctor might be walking or riding together. For if ever Horneck met him, his first question was always about Nicolay, whom Rewbell had imported into the estate. And, to be sure, he was hardly five minutes in the cottage, when the doctor began to question him once more.

'Yes, yes,' Rewbell said, 'he *is* a low sort. Upon my word, I know very little about him except that he came in convenient here. But really, sir, there are more than he battening on this estate.'

Horneck looked at his little man.

'You think,' he replied, 'that we are an assemblage of parasites. Well, maybe. Man *is* the most perfect parasite in the universe. Even the soul, you know, is a kind of parasite in God.'

'I must say, sir,' said Rewbell, 'that at North Bayton *our* opinion is that your philosophy has only had the effect of putting his lordship off his balance, and all your raillery against recognised principles has only derailed him.'

Horneck looked again at the pale, nimble little man

of microscopic wits, a sort of intellectual Jack the Giant-Killer come out to meet the Giant.

'Yes,' he said, 'we have been considerably upset ever since you came. You have jangled sweet Eight Bells out of tune. You surely have never heard of that phrase of a French master of satire: "Il n'y a pas de sentiment moins aristocratique que l'infidélité."'

Rewbell paused to see the effect of his learning.

'Go on,' said Horneck, smiling. 'I am interested, my little man. You might make your fortune in some fields. I enjoy nothing better than a clever attack on myself. Excellent little yelper!'

'Well, then,' said Rewbell, looking up at the Giant, 'I may tell you that I have come down here on a question infinitely more important than your theological opinions. Her ladyship, in short, has reason to believe that Lord Mompesson has conceived an extraordinary passion for your blind niece, and wishes to . . . to warn you in time.'

Hereupon he pointed with his thumb in the direction of Nicolay's cottage, and added that the doctor's profound knowledge of human nature doubtless included the familiar proverb, 'Like father, like son.' Horneck instantly displayed many signs of grief and embarrassment, and took two gigantic strides to the window, and then back again, and muttered words which Rewbell could not catch. Then he said that he thought too highly of the boy to suspect him in any way. The hot blood of youth has caused many sorts of disaster, no doubt, but he fully believed that the intentions of the young lord were honourable.

'Oh, ho!' cried Rewbell. 'And thus it's going to be a marriage, eh? These are the summits of your plotting, sir?'

'No, *sir*, no!' said Horneck, smiling.

Rewbell was about to put another question, when he and Horneck were both astonished by the entrance of Lady Mompesson. For, thinking that her own presence might have more effect, she had come to demean herself by actually imploring Horneck's assistance, and appealing to his honour, if he had any. The doctor received her with as much grace as his huge body would permit, and offered her a chair. But she refused, and lost no time in telling him for what reason she had come.

'Oh,' she said, talking rather loudly, 'you have robbed me of my son! You have made him an . . . an unbeliever! He has no love for me now—none! He has ordered me to leave the very house in which I gave birth to him.' (And here she broke down completely, but presently started again.) 'Yes, yes, I shall leave! I am prepared. But I ask you, I beseech you, prevent him . . . prevent him . . . disgracing my name further than I can bear! Take your . . . your niece away—do you hear?'

And then the unfortunate Countess, thoroughly overcome, sank down on a chair. Horneck, pitying her, came at once to her rescue, while Rewbell gave him some effectual glances.

'Fear nothing, my lady,' said Horneck. 'It was only yesterday I knew of the affection which seems to have grown up so curiously between his lordship and my poor blind child. I have had absolutely no hand in it—none whatever. And even although your ladyship approved of it, *I* would wholly disapprove. I have no intention of lifting a hand against the fortunes of the House of Mompesson. It may seem strange to your

ladyship to hear that. His lordship shall never marry my niece !'

Lady Mompesson, looking up at him in surprise, and hearing the genuine tones of his deep voice, fell to weeping once more, touched by this unexpected announcement.

'Never, indeed,' continued the doctor, 'would I permit such a thing !'

'Have I been wronging *you*, too ?' exclaimed Lady Mompesson. 'Is it the boy's own madness which has done everything, while I have been laying the blame on others ?'

And here Rewbell felt that he, too, was included in these references, and that he was scoring a little, although he regretted her ladyship's leniency to the monster.

'I assure your ladyship I never trouble myself about what people think or say about me. I am a poor student, that's all. And I live my own life, fighting my own stars ! Your son, whom I believe to be one of the purest, gentlest, most generous young fellows I have ever met, was good enough to ask me to be his friend. And, indeed, we have had a very charming companionship. But if it tends in any way to injure the House of Mompesson it shall cease at once. I shall leave at once with my poor blind child, provided — and here he glanced at Rewbell, and his eyes became a little fiercer — 'provided that that man next door is . . . is turned out, too, so that I may follow him !'

'Yes, yes, we are wishing indeed to get *them* away too !' said Lady Mompesson.

'You forget,' remarked Rewbell, 'that his lordship is master at North Bayton.'

'I shall see him this afternoon. He is to call on his way back from Eastdown,' said Horneck. 'We shall talk it over together. I shall persuade . . .'

'Doubtless he will obey you!' said Rewbell with a sneer.

'I shall perhaps persuade him. Isn't he going to London this season? He may meet someone there who will perhaps cause him to forget her. It is only his first wild love,' said Horneck. 'If I can't persuade him, then I and Harriet must leave.'

'Dr. Horneck,' said Lady Mompesson, 'I can only thank you from the bottom of my heart.'

Rewbell inwardly cursed from the bottom of his, and thought that if Harriet were actually taken away Harold would follow in any case.

'I hope,' he said to Horneck, 'you will not mention to his lordship that I have had anything to do with this. I have a difficult part to play, as her ladyship knows.'

'Her ladyship and you may both count on me,' replied the doctor.

Thus these three were busily stamping out the great fire love had kindled for Harold and Harriet. But it would not be so easily put out. For, meantime, Harriet, who had been in the next room, had heard the three voices, and came groping to the door. She felt convinced that there was some conspiracy against her, and when she heard Harold's name and her own she burst in.

'Oh yes!' she exclaimed, groping her way wildly among them. 'I have been listening. Where is Harold? Is he here? Are you doing anything against me?'

' Harriet, Harriet !' said Horneck sternly, ' go out !'  
' No, I won't ! no, I won't !' she cried. ' Don't touch me. You would not dare if Harold were here. Oh, if I could see !'

At this piteous sight Horneck turned to Lady Mompesson, who murmured :

' Poor child !'

' Yes, this is the blind little girl. Your ladyship is interested in the blind, I believe ?' asked Horneck.

' Yes,' said Lady Mompesson ; ' really, I am president of a Blind Society for Women !'

' So I hear,' said Horneck.

' No, no, I do not wish to live ! I shall not live !' Harriet was crying. ' Who are you all ? Oh, what have I done that you have taken him from me ? You are putting him against me because I am blind ! Oh, where is he ? He said he loved me. I am blind—I am only blind !'

' Harriet, Harriet !' cried Horneck, trying to quieten her. ' This is his lordship's mother. She is president of a Blind Society.'

Lady Mompesson, dimly conscious for the first time that life is rooted in ridicule and irony, advanced to meet the poor blind girl, who suddenly ceased crying.

' My poor child, are you ill ?' asked Lady Mompesson.

' Ill ? Oh, yes, yes ! Very. Sick unto death. You do not wish me to come near you. I hear by your voice !' said Harriet, withdrawing her hand. ' And just because I love your son and he loves me.'

Lady Mompesson, thoroughly shocked, felt that if Harriet had had eyes she never would have spoken thus. Or, at least, she would have blushed as she said it. But her face was pale, pale, and she was quivering.

'You are president of a Blind Society!' she exclaimed.

'Yes, my poor child, and I hope God will yet give you sight,' said Lady Mompesson.

'Harold told me that you kissed all the blind girls once a year.'

Lady Mompesson turned to Horneck, seeming to look to him for help, but Horneck stood gazing at the blind child. Rewbell then began to speak.

'I hope,' he said, 'it is understood——' But Harriet, recognising his voice in a moment, turned on him with:

'*You* here! *You*, too! You told lies about him. Oh, I know it's a conspiracy! Where is he? Where is he? I tell you all I shall die if you take him from me!'

Rewbell said, 'Hush!' and then signed to Horneck to take her away. Horneck, thinking it better to do so, laid his hands on her, and he was so strong and she was so light and fragile that he lifted her easily, his blind little burden, and carried her away.

'What a scene!' exclaimed Lady Mompesson, while she heard the sobs as Horneck carried Harriet up the stair. 'What *are* we to do?'

When Horneck came down, he said again that he would see Harold that afternoon on his lordship's return from Eastdown, and then Lady Mompesson, followed by Rewbell, went back to North Bayton to await the event.

Horneck felt nervous as he awaited Harold, because he knew that their friendship was now in imminent peril. But the issue was clear, and he did not hesitate. Doubtless he could do little or nothing legally to thwart Harriet's marriage, but the mere idea of it was so preposterous that he meant to use to the full his enormous

influence over Harold. As for Harriet, it would be easy to quell *her*. In a few months, or at the most in a few years, she would forget Harold, and become more and more impassive under her fate. She would in any case be a disastrous wife, and Harold's love for her, he thought, was only a first fierce dream. When it was over, could she really be a companion to him, receive his guests, go with him into society, play the rôle which his wife would require to play ?

Harold, therefore, when he came back that afternoon from Eastdown, found Horneck in a very resolute mood. But he seemed also to detect in the doctor's manner certain traces of excitement wholly new. He had decided to tell him everything, and he was not long in Twilight Cottage before he asked for Harriet.

'She is not well, your lordship,' said Horneck.

'Not well!' exclaimed Harold, jumping up.

Horneck, without replying, looked at him and smiled. And then the boy told everything.

'Yes,' he stammered, 'I . . . I ought to have told you. I . . . I love her, doctor!'

Horneck was tempted to affect surprise, but he told the boy frankly that he knew all about it. And then came Harold's full announcement that they were engaged. Now, if the doctor had disliked him, if he had had a grudge of any sort against him, his task would have been easier at that moment. But Harold's presence, his clear eyes, his boyish fervour, and his look of seriousness, made the task very difficult indeed.

'Harold, he said, with his voice trembling, 'it's not possible.'

At these words the blood left Harold's face as he looked up, excitedly demanding an explanation.

'It would be criminal in me to encourage it,' continued Horneck. 'It must not be!'

'Doctor! Doctor Horneck, do you say so?' cried Harold passionately. 'And why?'

'Because you are Lord Mompesson, and she . . . she is a poor blind girl.'

Harold looked at him for a moment, and tried to discover a hidden meaning behind these words, and thought he had discovered it.

'Oh, I know what you are thinking,' he said. 'You are thinking of the vile gossip of the village. You are thinking I'm going to be . . . to be . . . like my . . . my cursed father, I suppose! Doctor, *you*!'

'Not at all—never!' protested the doctor. 'Dear Harold, I love you as if you were my own son. Think no evil of me—none, Harold!'

'Why . . . why do you mistrust me, then?'

'It's because I trust you so much that I am afraid,' replied Horneck. 'I know you wish to make her your wife. And that's what I must prevent. Your heir might be blind, Harold. Oh, it's because I love you that I must save you from this tremendous mistake.'

'No, doctor—no, never! Harriet is mine, say what you like. She is *mine*! Where is she?'

'Ah, hush, my dear boy—listen, listen! said the doctor excitedly. 'This is a terrible passion. This is your first love, Harold, and although first love is the sacredest thing known to man, I wish you to . . . to forget Harriet.'

'Oh, never!' cried Harold. 'Doctor, she is not yours to withhold!'

'Then we must leave North Bayton. I am her guardian. I will take her away. It shall never be said

that I lifted a hand against the House of Mompesson !' said Horneck.

Harold, stupefied, looked round the little room.

'Stop, Harold ! Listen. Ah, do ! This is the most painful moment of my life. I feel that the cords of our friendship are about to snap. Let us save them from that !'

'Doctor, I tell you I must have her. She is mine ! Harriet is mine !'

'Will you promise me one thing ?' asked Horneck.

'What is it, doctor ?'

'I believe in you. I trust you fully. I would ask you to *wait*. Think this over. Go away for a little. Go to London with your mother. Don't vex her, Harold. I have been told already that some painful scene has passed between you, and that you have ordered her to leave North Bayton.'

'Yes, I am sorry. I did not mean it,' said Harold.

'Well, then, don't you think it would be wiser to wait. It is terrible for me to think that *we* are the cause of strife between you. Your mother is really right about this affair, though she may be harsh in expressing her ideas about it. You must not handicap your future by taking a blind wife.'

'I love no one but Harriet !' exclaimed Harold.

'But tell me what you think of my proposal,' said Horneck.

'What good will waiting do ? My mind is made up. It shall never change. Where is Harriet ? I wish to see her.'

'Yes, yes, you shall see her. But won't you agree to what I say ?'

'I can't live without Harriet.'

'A blind wife, Harold!'

'Yes.'

'I assure you it would be much better for Harriet also, if you did what I wish. She is too excited. Think what it must mean to her. She is utterly exhausted. It will have an injurious effect on her imagination.' And as her guardian I must insist, Harold,' said Horneck almost sternly. 'But if after you have fully considered this tremendous step you still remain as earnest as you are now, I shall be the first to . . . to give my consent. You may trust me absolutely. I shall take care of her. But I ask you first to try to see this thing in the right proportions. You will thank me *some* day. You were going to London, at any rate, were you not?'

'Yes,' said Harold.

In short, although Harold protested to the end that he would never surrender his love for Harriet, he was too anxious not to quarrel with the doctor, and after some pressure promised to delay the serious step. A great deal of pain might thus be saved poor Harriet. They would all see in the end that he was honest. Moreover, he had too fine a nature to wish the breach between his mother and himself widened, and he thought that this compromise would be the best way to save everyone's feelings. His mother and he, therefore, had a very affecting reconciliation, and they prepared to go to London together. Thus, their original intention of leaving Eight Bells for a little in order to escape its gossip would be carried out.

Even Harold felt that it was now more necessary than ever. And besides, in any case, he would require to go, since Leaf and Merridge required his presence in town. The estate accounts had not been audited since the late

Earl's death. Harold would soon settle these affairs, and come back to his Harriet, he thought, and then the doctor would be convinced.

There was, therefore, no garden-party for the blind that year at North Bayton, because Lady Mompesson, immediately on receipt of Harold's orders, had cancelled all arrangements. But Harold told her that, so far from wishing her to leave North Bayton, he wished her to remain there for ever. She then kissed him very affectionately, and although she felt that his purpose was still fixed, and that it was only the tenderness of his nature which was dominating him for the moment, she hoped that amid the gaiety of a London season he would discover someone who would make him forget the passionate blind child. Harold knew that that would be impossible, but he determined to be patient, and win the doctor's consent. It would mean less pain to Harriet, less confusion to everyone. It would be terrible indeed to bring strife between Horneck and the niece he had so lovingly tended. And when Harold explained these things to Harriet, and said that his blind darling would be patient for a few weeks just to show the doctor how fixed, how unalterable, was their love for each other, she clung to him very passionately, and said she hoped indeed he would come back.

'Come back! I should just think so, my dear, dear girl!' exclaimed Harold.

'They think that you will forget me. They wish you to see all the beauties in London. Ah, Harold, why ~~are~~ you going?' she said, weeping. 'And the beauties have eyes.'

'Darling,' he said, 'I ~~should~~ <sup>have to go if</sup> ~~Basanti~~ <sup>my</sup> ~~Bally~~ <sup>had</sup> any case. I have a lot of business to ~~look after~~, <sup>look after</sup> I ~~shall~~ <sup>be</sup> back very soon, my darling Harriet!'

'How long will you be away, Harold ?'

'I shall not be three weeks away. The apple-blossom won't be off the trees when I come back. Besides, you know, dearest, I would have to go in any case. I have never been in town since my father died, and I have a great deal to do with our lawyers. I am going to settle everything for *you*, too.'

'Harold, Harold !' she said, 'I feel you will never come back. Oh, if I could see you at this moment ! Have they been putting you against me, Harold ?'

'Harriet, you are mine !' he said, giving her one last close-pressed kiss. 'No one can separate us—never think it !'

And then she listened to his retreating steps, and called : 'Harold ! Harold !'

Before he started for London he had a conversation with Rewbell, who was to be left in charge.

'Edwin,' he said, smiling, 'you know how things stand. I am going away for a short time—by the way, give me those papers for Leaf and Merridge—and I wish the doctor and . . . and Miss Paston to be well looked after.'

'Yes, your lordship.'

'I trust you absolutely, Edwin, and I wish you to see that . . . that she is never in any danger at the cliffs. Someone must always be on the look-out.'

'I shall be on the look-out myself, your lordship,' said Rewbell.

'And send flowers and anything they need. Remember, now.'

'Your lordship may rely upon *me*.'

'I am frightfully anxious, in case she goes near these cliffs.'

'I shall look after her, your lordship'

## CHAPTER VIII

NICOLAY IS AT LAST DRIVEN TO CONFESS TO DR. HORNECK, AND DURING HAROLD'S ABSENCE REWBELL'S LOVE FOR HARRIET RAGES FURIOUSLY

NICOLAY had ceased to steal along on moonless nights to *The Eight Bells* tavern, where his numerous friends were always awaiting him. They began to miss him, and to ask what was up with old Nico. It was certainly convenient for the penniless loafers and swaggerers of the village to possess a friend who could actually provide drinks to a whole roomful at a time, and yet never expect any in return ; and, moreover, ever since the scene in the church, where old Heath had publicly arraigned and insulted the statue of the defunct Earl, there was a general demand to hear Nicolay on the subject of those buried jokes and terrors. His previous hints were only now fully appreciated, and he was expected to expand them into an engrossing tale. There was likewise intense curiosity regarding Millie, who had not shown herself to the parish for about a twelvemonth ; so that the wives of the roisterers sat up to hear any news they might bring these long summer nights after the tavern door had been closed upon them, and they came reeling home on tipsy roads. Then, too,

since Nicolay was near North Bayton, and was next neighbour to Dr. Horneck, he had surely something to say on the frolics and budding sins of the *young* lord and the blind child. Indeed, the chief need of the moment was some exact news, something really authentic about this extraordinary matter. It was known, for instance, that his lordship and the blind girl had been *on the downs* together, on the shore, actually in the cave, and there were all sorts of rumours about his 'real intentions.' Some said that his sudden disappearance had a sinister reason behind it, and that the blind child had, to be sure, gone once too often into the cave. Some said he had quarrelled with Horneck, others that he was looking out for a wife at last, and others that it was actually the blind girl herself, Dr. Horneck's niece, forsooth! who was going to be the new Countess. But all agreed that the name of Mompesson was no longer what it had been, that it was rather a mysterious and ill-omened name nowadays, and that North Bayton had ceased to be the old proud castle under whose shadow Eight Bells had been content to sleep and wake for ages. Even Porlock, who had of late passed its gates more often than he had entered them, had heard enough about Harold's walks with Harriet to make him think that the dignity of the Mompessons had reached its period of decline, and that the sins of the fathers were bearing bitter fruit. That his lordship was actually an unbeliever and the blind child's lover seemed incredible tales, and at first he had only lifted up his hands and shaken his head in derision. But in both cases the rumour had changed quickly into a fact, and Porlock could only speculate with his wife and daughters on the strange news.

Clearly, Horneck had been the evil genius of North Bayton, and Porlock felt the melancholy pleasure of rejected prophets. The young Earl and his mother had therefore left enough for Eight Bells to talk about during the long summer days, which filled its one quiet street with home-coming heaped waggons of the early hay. Not even Porlock was ashamed to lend an ear to any prattler who had a tale to carry, and doubtless if he had met Rewbell or Nicolay he would have stopped him by the roadside and asked his news. But Rewbell was generally invisible, or was seen being driven by Wharton rapidly from one point of the estate to another. Nicolay would have served better, but the truth was that he was now unable to stir from his cottage. He would have been, indeed, glad enough to revisit the tavern to escape the cries of Millicent's infant, with whose apparition he never ceased to upbraid her. He would have been glad also to escape the doctor, who was still attending Millicent, and never lost an opportunity of making himself disagreeable to Nicolay. But he was too ill with nothing less than a revised form of the fever which had assailed him in the Australian Bush. Although he struggled hard to keep his feet, and staggered about till the last possible minute, he was compelled one day to take to bed. He gave strict orders, however, that he was to be left alone. He wished no doctor, he said, to come to *him*! And in spite of the fever and the ague which seized him in turn, and although he was ghastly and wizened and altogether a terror for Millicent to look upon and live with, he dared her to inform Horneck.

But Horneck informed himself. For he had missed Nicolay three days, and on the fourth he asked Milli-

cent excitedly where her husband had gone. When she said he was ill in bed, Horneck at once went uninvited to the room, and stepped uninvited in, without knocking even.

Nicolay, who was lying on his back, had started at the heavy step on the stair, which he knew too well, and when the doctor entered he cried out :

' Go away ! Who told you to come here ?'

Horneck, however, without heeding these words, took a chair and sat down by the bedside, and looked at his man, who was already much changed by three days of fever and thirst. Indeed, as Horneck had suspected long ago, the Bush fever had never completely left him, but had been burning slowly within him like a submerged, half-stifled fire.

Nicolay was apparently very agitated as the doctor sat silently looking at him.

Presently Horneck said :

' You will let me feel your pulse, will you not ?'

Nicolay then quite submissively put out his wrist above the bedclothes, and the doctor took it and counted time on his watch. It was unmistakable that he had fever pulse.

Horneck asked him if his head was sore, and he said yes, terribly sore. Had he pains in the abdomen ? He said yes, that the pain was frightful. Horneck then looked at his tongue, which was very dry and of the colour of lemon, and asked him if he didn't feel very prostrate. Nicolay said yes again, and here Horneck noticed that the man's eyes were moist, as if tears were in them. He said, however, that he was feeling better than he had felt yesterday. Horneck hardly believed it. At any rate, it was evident that he was suffering

from a recurrence of a species of yellow fever. His thirst was terrific, and when Horneck pressed his stomach, even slightly, he yelled. Now, this is an extraordinary fever, and may carry a man off in twenty-four hours. Horneck thought, however, that Nicolay might last a day or two yet, but the fever, unchecked, had already gained a complete mastery. He was evidently in great alarm. Presently he was overtaken by the terrible vomitings which accompany this fever, and are caused by some fierce irritation of the gastric mucus. Horneck felt that no time must be lost, and he ordered Millicent to send at once to the chemist at Eight Bells for ice and soda.

Millicent, however, only shrugged her shoulders callously, and said Nicolay was none of hers. Horneck spoke angrily to her, but she went about her own business, so that he was compelled to cross over to Twilight Cottage and send his servant. He then came back to Nicolay and blistered him.

In about half an hour the gastric symptoms were reduced, and when the ice and soda came he gave him a drink. He then applied blisters. Nicolay seemed quite grateful, and feebly thanked the doctor. It was the first case of yellow fever Horneck had seen, and it was characteristic of him to be wholly absorbed for the moment in the scientific aspect of it. But he was attending a man of whom he had implacable suspicion. He determined to sit up the night with him, and meantime warned Millicent that her husband was in grave danger. But Millicent only stared blankly, as if such news had no concern for her.

When Horneck went up to Nicolay again he found him throwing himself from one side of the bed to the

other in great agitation. He was apparently growing more anxious, and turned piteously to Horneck.

'This is . . . is the . . . same fever, doctor,' he said in a voice growing gradually weaker, 'which . . . carried off . . . Elsie.'

Horneck drew nearer to the bed, and looked with terrible earnestness in his face while he lay affrighted beneath him.

'Now, hear me!' said Horneck, trying to subdue his voice for the sake of the ears of the dying man. 'Hear me, I tell you! . . . Oh gracious! is Elsie dead?'

'Doc . . . tor Horneck,' gasped Nicolay, 'it is shameful, teasing a sick man! . . . I've told you she . . . she died under the golden-wattle tree.'

'You swear it before God here on your . . . oh yes, it *may* be your death-bed!'

'Good God! it'll not be my death-bed unless you make it. I'll have another doctor!'

Hereupon the terrified man tried to shout for Millicent, but his voice utterly failed him, and he covered his face with his hands.

'Now, will you at last answer my question?' asked Horneck. 'Turn and look at me and tell me. I shall pull you through if I can.'

Nicolay, taking his pinched hands off his eyes, turned a withered, fever-eaten face, but was so suddenly overpowered by Horneck's fixed glare that he sank among the pillows again, swearing fully it was all true.

'Tell me—look at me—tell me!' urged Horneck. 'Here on your death-bed.'

'My death-bed! How dare you?' cried Nicolay in the voice of the death-rattle itself.

'Why have you been so patient, then, if I have wronged you? You have done nothing to defend yourself.'

'I tell you I am innocent; that's all I've to defend myself with. Of course you've wronged me.'

'Well, then,' said Horneck, 'if Elsie died . . . O God, why am I so filled with doubts? Why can't I believe you, then? It would set me at peace. If I am wrong, I have done you an enormous wrong, which nothing can right.'

'Yes, that's it,' said Nicolay feebly.

'My position, then, should be at your feet to ask forgiveness?'

'Yes . . . I forgive you.'

'Ay indeed? Oh, no, no! I believe you are an embodied crime, and your coffin will be heavy with the corpse of my daughter as well as your own.'

Here Nicolay shuddered, and then wept, and told the doctor he was a cruel tyrant. Then he became resolutely taciturn, and refused to answer a single question more. Horneck waited in vain to see the truth wriggling out of the nest of lies in which it lay caught. So that as it grew dusk he rose and went heavily down the stair. There at the foot he met Millicent, and told her Nicolay would die. But Millicent only shrugged her shoulders again.

'The vermin will die, do you hear?' said Horneck, 'without telling me the truth. Gracious God!'

'It's nothing to me what'll happen to a woebegone rascal,' said Millicent.

Horneck then trudged out of the cottage into his own, and acquainted Harriet with what was passing. But Harriet listened idly, too. What did it matter to her,

indeed? for her own thoughts and blind hopes were elsewhere.

'Will no one sympathize with me?' cried Horneck. 'Will no one see that . . . Oh, God! I loved my child and must know the truth!'

'Will no one sympathize with me?' mocked Harriet in her own earnest grief. 'Where is Harold? Where is he? He said he would write, but I never hear from him. Are you keeping back his letters, uncle? Do you dare? You have told him not to marry me because I am blind. Why did he kiss me, then? Why did he dare?'

'Harriet! Harriet!' said Horneck. 'Love's gladness is only on the way to his tribulation! Be at peace, child. Save yourself from every kind of passion and illusion. Be thankful you have no eyes to see human guilt! Be still, be still! We are such fleeting, crime-burdened things! If you could see the sky, Harriet! Tempest after tempest has crossed it, and it remains serene.'

'Where is Harold, I ask you!'

'My Elsie! my Elsie!' exclaimed Horneck, not listening to her, and going out dazed.

He returned to his victim at midnight, the hour which old doctors asleep in superstition used to believe specially dangerous to the dying, as if extra forces of evil were arrayed against them at the waning of the night. Millicent had promised to leave the door ajar, so that when she and her child were fast asleep in bed, Horneck stepped into Elsie Cottage, and went heavily up the wooden stair by candle-light. Nicolay was waking, and he turned and peered fearfully into the semi-darkness, and said:

' *You again!*'

' Yes,' said Horneck, sitting beside him, '*again!*'

Nicolay remained still resolute, however, and said nothing. Horneck was determined to save him, if possible, for even twenty-four hours, in order that, driven at last by these gusts of death, he would confess.

' How are you? how are you?' he said, in a much kinder voice.

' Awful! '

Horneck indeed perceived that the minutes were running out, and that it was necessary to catch him before his brain broke into delirium. The deep yellow colour was all over him, and there were signs of ecchymosis, and the black liquid was at the corners of the mouth. The pulse, which had been fever-quick, was now flapping perilously up and down.

' Cold feet?' asked Horneck.

Nicolay could not speak.

' Are you cold?' said Horneck again, placing another blanket at his feet.

' It's bitter cold!' said Nicolay.

' Speak! speak!' cried the doctor. ' Ah, my God, even though the truth is terrible, speak!'

Although Nicolay responded nothing, Horneck knew, by various little signs, that he was still conscious. Coma would no doubt supervene, but it was not coma yet.

Presently Nicolay turned, and threw out his arms, and made as if he wished to communicate something.

' Oh, God help me! is it coming?' whispered Horneck in the stillness which was broken only by his own

whisper and the ticking of a loud clock in Millicent's kitchen.

'Doctor . . . doc . . . tor!' exclaimed Nicolay feebly, and then stopped.

'Oh, what is it?' asked Horneck, hardly able to sit still on his chair.

'I am dying, I believe. Save me!'

'Where is Elsie? Quick!'

'Will . . . you save me?' asked Nicolay, turning a terrified face on the doctor. 'I . . . shall . . . tell everything!'

'Oh, villain, say it—say it at once and at last!' shrieked Horneck, with a voice so loud that Millicent downstairs awoke, and her child cried—a voice that seemed to shatter the dying man.

But Nicolay still hesitated, and the truth came wriggling only slowly out..

At length he said: 'Elsie . . . ain't dead. I . . . I gave her to . . . the naked blacks. And she went shrieking . . .'

'O God! O God!' cried Horneck, seizing the dying man and shaking him where he lay. 'Where is she? Oh, horrible! Oh, where?'

Nicolay lay crushed by the doctor's fury, and could say nothing more. There was a step on the stair, but Horneck did not hear it, because his voice was filling the room. Porlock, however, had been sent for by Nicolay early that afternoon, and having been at another sick-bed at Seadown, it was only at this late hour that the Vicar, on his way home, had been able to come.

Nicolay had been a regular churchgoer, and Porlock, as his pastor, recognised duties towards him, no matter what his past had been. And Nicolay, feeling the need

for some disclosure, had wished to pour his confession into the ears of the sober Vicar. So that Porlock entered as a messenger of comfort at the very moment when Horneck was overpowering the dying man by terrible invective. Porlock, amazed at the noise and at the sight of the huge man gesticulating at the bedside, arrived next him before Horneck was aware. When Horneck turned, Porlock was almost blinded by his look. Nicolay, still clear in mind, was making feeble gestures for protection to the Vicar, and was beckoning him to come near.

'Oh! . . . Oh!' cried Horneck. 'My daughter! my daughter!'

Porlock asked an explanation, and in a few rapid and stormy words Horneck explained it all.

'Where is she? Oh gracious! where?'

'He has repented, Dr. Horneck—he has repented. Leave the dying man,' said Porlock sternly.

'Repented! Will you turn my brain into a heap of oaths—will you? Repented! Will it bring my daughter back? Where is . . . Oh, my Elsie!'

Porlock attempted to get nearer to quieten the excitement of the dying man.

'Dr. Horneck, this is shocking, at death's door!' said Porlock; while Nicolay looked frantically from the one to the other.

'O Heaven! my daughter . . .'

'Dr. Horneck,' said Porlock calmly, 'there is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine just persons.'

'My daughter! my daughter!' shrieked Horneck, lifting up his hands, while Millicent, attracted by the noise, was peering in at the door. 'If his God forgives him,

He is not my God. Yes, fill your kingdom with vermin, and worn-out blackguards and mediocrities, and cast into outer darkness, as you have always done, the high and the mighty of the human brain. He is "saved," is he? . . . And my daughter . . . my poor Elsie . . . Oh! . . . oh! . . .

'Dr. Horneck, leave him alone!' cried Porlock, as the doctor pressed nearer the bed as if to attack him. 'You told us there was no evil, no sin! Now you see that there is no help for us except in the love of God. The hands of the Redeemer have touched many a soul more soiled than this one, and still remain white.'

'Ah, God!' exclaimed Horneck, now convulsed in agony, and staggering from the room and down the stair and out into the calm night.

Porlock heard his voice far over the downs as he went calling, 'Elsie! Elsie!' He went raving to the cliff-heads, and looking out to the sea, moon-tinctured, calling her name till it was borne by every wind through the pale summer night. And even at day-break, when dawn was tingeing the cliffs and breaking the edges of night, they still found him by the cliff-heads with his 'Elsie! Elsie!' like some vast figure of human misery stalking on these silent downs.

Porlock, who had been sitting up all night with Nicolay, having vainly urged Millicent to do her duty, met the haggard giant about five in the morning half a mile from Twilight Cottage. He had a look in his face as if a temporary madness had seized him. Porlock, who was hurrying home for breakfast, stopped to speak, and asked him to go back and to forgive the wretched Nicolay before the end.

'Till seventy times seven, Dr. Horneck.'

Horneck, with his hair dishevelled and a terrible light in his eyes, told him to go home and to take one of his daughters on his knee, and ask himself how *he* would act if she were robbed from him and cast into hell.

'Oh gracious, my Elsie!' he shrieked again at the thoughts.

'I am sorry for you. It is awful!' said Porlock.

'Is he dead? Is the vermin dead? Is there more ecchymosis?'

'There is a black liquid about his lips and coming from his nostrils.'

'Oh, then he'll die any moment.'

Porlock hurried away, and then Horneck went back to his cottage to acquaint Harriet with Elsie's fate. But Harriet seemed to listen idly again. Horneck, growing still more restless, fled into Elsie Cottage, only to hear that Nicolay, after ten minutes' delirium, had died.

A curious instinct caused him to follow the body to the grave, for he could scarcely believe that Nicolay was now out of his reach for ever. There he met old dazed Heath, and a number of the villagers who had come out of curiosity, and the tipplers, to be sure, who would miss Nicolay in Eight Bells. Porlock met the body at the entrance to the churchyard, while Horneck, as if impelled to see Nicolay shut down for ever, followed in a mood of extraordinary fierceness, wondering why, if the Office is not to be used for those who have 'laid violent hands upon themselves,' it should be used for one who had laid violent hands upon another. Rewbell was absent, but Wharton, keeping his eye on Horneck, who stood aloof from the crowd, watching the coffin disappear, helped to lower it. He had heard of Nicolay's confession, of course, and came up to the doctor to

speak about it; but Horneck, turning his back on him, walked slowly away, with eyes dry and terribly fixed and hard. He lost no time in leaving for London, where he meant to discover whether it was possible to follow up Elsie's traces, but it was with a brain so bewildered and a heart so torn, that when Harold saw him he hardly recognised him.

Meantime, Rewbell perceived that he was now able to play fast and loose with the situation. Even before Horneck left for London there had been sufficient opportunity, because he had very faithfully obeyed Harold's orders to watch over Harriet. Hardly a day passed but he came down to Twilight Cottage, and if he did not see Harriet, he at least saw Horneck, and spoke humorously to him on the young Earl's passion. But if the doctor had been less preoccupied with dark thoughts of his own, he might have seen that beneath Rewbell's apparent amusement and cynicism there was burning an extraordinary hate. He pretended to take a genuine interest in Nicolay's confession and the doctor's agony, and he made some observations on the infamy of human nature. But he had always kept aloof both from Nicolay and Horneck, and now the thing he passionately wished was Horneck's immediate departure. For then he might be able to watch over Harriet more carefully than ever. He urged the doctor, therefore, to lose no time in putting his case before the colonial authorities, who might cause inquiries to be made regarding Elsie's fate in the wild Bush. And until he knew, he was going to spend some very restless hours, walking to and fro in the vast gardens of North Bayton, or climbing the towers in order to have at least a glimpse of the roof of Twilight Cottage.

When at last he knew that Horneck had gone, he determined to see the blind girl. As he was leaving the gateway on his road to the cottage, he espied her far across the downs near the telegraph-posts. But she was already near the 'cursed edge,' as Harold called it, before Rewbell came running up and cried 'Stop!' There was a slight fringe of sea-haze creeping along, the cliffs, and threatening to spread landward. Harriet turned quickly round, remembering suddenly a day which seemed already long past, and listened for the voice again, not yet recognising it, but hoping it was Harold's.

'Stop!' cried Rewbell again, as he came up to her.

'Oh,' it is *you*!' exclaimed Harriet, moving backwards.

'Gracious God! Go no further, not a step,' cried Rewbell, 'or you'll be over!'

He ran round and seized her from behind.

'What horrible fascination have the cliff-heads got for you?' he exclaimed.

'What . . . what! . . . Leave me!' she cried, shaking him off.

'Now,' he said, 'will you let me speak to you? Will you let me advise you? Now, was I not right? I know you are miserable, while *he* is spending a gay time.'

'How do *I* know? Leave me! I shall live my blind life alone now.'

He looked at her, very eager to hold her again.

'Has he not written?'

'He may have written to uncle. I know nothing . . . nothing! I wish to know nothing!' said Harriet, and she burst into tears.

'We all expect that he has forgotten you. Your uncle is perfectly right, you know. The Earl is having a wonderful time, attending great parties, balls, and being much run after.'

'Oh! . . . oh! . . . let me flee! I wish to hear nothing. How can I fight when I am blind?' she exclaimed.

'Let me take you back,' said Rewbell.

'Leave me!' she said.

Rewbell looked at her pale, quivering face, and let her go groping her way back from telegraph-post to telegraph-post, till she reached the road and the cottage. And then he sat down musing by the cliffs.

So far from having forgotten her, Harold had written letters to the doctor, in every one of which he had mentioned her dear name. It was impossible to write letters to her, since she could not read them. But he sent presents for her, and told the doctor to say to her that he would be back soon—soon. These things perturbed Horneck, and he referred to them as little as possible. But when she asked for news he said that, to be sure, the Earl had been asking for her, but laid no emphasis on the fact. Then came Nicolay's confession, which seemed to unhinge for the moment the doctor's brain, and he went hastily to London, leaving Harriet to her fate.

And now all her doubts had thickened, and she was left to her own tragic feelings. It was the very opportunity for Rewbell, who had only enjoyed a few maddened glimpses of her. Now he cared for nothing but the possession of her. He had saved money. He was tired of North Bayton. He would leave. He would run away with her, he said. How

easily the door of her dim life could now be opened to him!

And all the time Harriet, plunged in her own passionate darkness, was wondering what the human face must be like. The sleeping forces of her being had been suddenly awakened, only to be crushed again. In a moment of blind despair she determined to grope her way up to North Bayton to find out if Harold might not be there. She knew that the gates lay about a hundred yards beyond Elsie Cottage, and she found her way by the hedge until she came to the masonry and pillars which closed the approach. The carriage-gates were shut, and it was in vain she tried to open them. There was no one on the road, and the lodge-keeper was away, so that she might have stood clamouring blindly for hours to get in. But she went a few paces further, and came suddenly upon the foot-gate, which opened to pressure. Then she found herself on the great winding avenue, which glimmered before her, and she knew that sooner or later it must lead to the castle.

She was almost intoxicated by the scents of the flowers. For it was high June. And she marked her progress by the different perfumes which met her as she moved slowly up. All the air seemed elusive luxury to her. And once she knew she must be passing great beds of lilies, and then roses.

Now and again the avenue darkened under her feet, owing to the great shadows cast by dense trees. But then she emerged into the light, and knew that this must be the shining lawn of which the doctor used to speak. The castle windows commanded all the lawn, so that anyone stepping on it would be seen at once.

Harriet, growing fatigued and confused owing to the want of shadow which, mingled with light, generally guided her steps, since she distinguished the difference, stumbled among the rhododendron bushes, and sat down, weeping, on the grass. Rewbell had seen her from his window, and came running down in excitement.

'What is it?' he asked, while she recognised his voice at once.

'Is this his palace?'

'Yes; come up. I shall tell you everything,' said Rewbell, as he helped her to rise, and then led her up the avenue.

And it mattered little if any of the servants saw him, if even Wharton, for instance, saw him, for they all knew that he had been left in special charge of her, and that she was to be guided through the grounds whenever she wished. He took her, therefore, into one of the sumptuous rooms on the southern veranda, which was well screened from the sun, and when the door was shut he felt that she was the most sumptuous thing in it. Nay, the pale, terrible little man had certainly never experienced such sumptuous emotions.

'Listen to me!' he said, in a voice so extraordinarily stifled with excitement that there was little promise in it of a long speech.

But he made a persuasive tale about the fickleness of young lords and the weakness of human character generally, and asked the blind girl what, indeed, *she* could know of the traps of life, and if she supposed that the gay heir of a great name would wed a blind child. Let her lay her blind beauty in more careful hands.

'Turn to me. I have known all the Mompeßons. This is their way. His father—oh, ho, his father! . . .

We shall flee! I am sick of their service,' he said, while Harriet listened, terrified and thrilled. She was blind, yes, yes, he said, but all great things are blind—even God, it seems, and Sorrow and Love, and the very earth, with its light lost, moves blind through the heavens. Her life was midnight, no doubt, just *midnight*, but he, would make it moonlight for her! He would give her the sober poetry of a permanent affection. Nay, how could she deliver herself, he asked, from love, blind love, this rooted dogma of our being? And if she sinned, she would be blind in that too, cut off from all moralities, unaware even of the blush which disturbs and glorifies the human face. 'Turn to me,' he said, 'turn to me! Great lords are great lords. I have been their servant too long. What have I received except insult and contempt, although I have guided their fortunes for them?'

'I am blind, blind!' she exclaimed, 'and terrified!'

'Harriet, there is no need. Listen to me!'

'Oh, if I had eyes to see the world and men's faces, they would burst on me with such a glare! I would be stunned. . . . I am standing in such doubt. I am in such misery: I need someone—someone! I may be on the edge of a precipice!'

'Harriet!' he cried, and took her and captured her and kissed her wildly, while she felt that for her love and terror were the same emotion. . . .

So that those were gorgeous summer nights for them, a few summer nights in the vast, warm gardens of North Bayton, sun-filled all day, and covered up by rich, warm arras of night. For he knew every warm bower and secret trellis. And all the air about her seemed like luxury distilled, although she felt that terror was in

their midst—blind terror whispering to her and claiming and bewildering her, and saying that she was really *his* and belonged to none other! For these are the great passions that seize and swoop upon the soul, carrying it down bewildering roads. . . .

Well, then, one long night at Twilight Cottage, this thief of love took the silver spur in his hand for a moment, and threw it out in derision on the road, where it lay glittering in the moonlight. . . .

But a day came, and came swiftly, when Harriet's sense of terror and love was frightfully quickened.

The postman brought one morning, at eight o'clock, a letter addressed 'Miss Harriet Paston,' and when the servant took it to Harriet, she told her to open and read it.

'It will be from uncle,' she said.

But when the maid began to read, 'My dearest, dearest Harriet,' the blind girl turned pale. She seized the letter, and ordered the servant to read no more, but then gave it back trembling, and cried:

'Read! read!'

So the girl read:

'MY DEAREST, DEAREST HARRIET,

'It will not be long now before I shall be at your side again. The tedious business with my lawyers, connected with debts due to the estate, is almost finished, and, indeed, part of it was not tedious, because I have been settling everything for *you*, darling! But I am tired of everyone here. Don't suppose for a moment that I can enjoy myself when not near you, and if I haven't written since your uncle left, it was because I did not wish the letter to fall into the wrong hands and

under the wrong eyes. But I simply can't help myself, and *must* write. So I hope Jessie [this was Harriet's servant girl] will read it to you, you dear darling! You must have got all my messages through the doctor. How sorry I am for him! He came here an utter wreck, ~~and~~, really, I think it is affecting his mind. He has been told that there is almost no hope of tracing his daughter, because that blackguard, whom I hate to think of as having been your neighbour, had abandoned her in an unexplored part of Australia. God knows where she can be now! I think a man who deserts a woman should be hanged. Darling, whenever I come back I shall take steps to clear out your neighbours on each side. But, any way, it won't be long until you will exchange Twilight Cottage for North Bayton. I do hope you are taking care of yourself, and that Edwin is taking care of you. Don't go near the cliffs. Oh, darling, I can't sleep at night for thinking of it! You are my own, are you not? I hate the miles that divide us, but they won't divide us long. This is Thursday; well, I hope to be back on Tuesday next week. I simply *will* come, whether the business is finished or not. Perhaps your uncle will come back with me. I must take care of him now. Darling, darling, all my kisses!

'HAROLD.'

Harriet waited till the last words had been read, and then gave a terrible cry, while the servant-girl ran to save her from falling.

'O God! . . . O God!' cried Harriet. 'Oh, take me away . . . I wish to die! I do—I do!'

'Oh, miss, what's took you?' exclaimed the girl, as she

brought her to the sofa, where Harriet lay down in blind misery and confusion.

'Oh! . . . Oh!' she cried, while the maid could think of no one but Rewbell to run for, and hurried away to North Bayton for him.

'If . . . if I have sinned, it was because I had no eyes! God knows it! Oh, Harold, let me kiss your feet just once and die! Oh, I am thankful now that I can never, never see your face!'

Rewbell came hurrying down, and found her almost unrecognisable on the sofa. He asked what was wrong, but she lay sobbing, while he seized the letter and read it, affrighted..

'Let us flee!' he said. 'There's plenty of time. I mean to marry you. Let us flee to-day—to-morrow!'

'Villain!' she exclaimed. 'Go! go! I do not wish to escape. I wish to throw myself at his feet.'

But he urged her, and seized and kissed her, and said again that she was his, his! while she struggled in his arms and said no, no! and that she would perish in her own blind shame alone. He spent all the afternoon with her, while the maid heard their terrible dialogue with consternation.

'O God, help me!' cried Harriet. 'If I have sinned, it was because I was blind. If I had had eyes . . . Oh . . . oh . . . I am filled with terror!'

'Harriet, come!' he said. 'Come! The same stars are shining. This was to be our night.'

'The stars! They must be black! He said he would love me till the stars were black. Gracious God!' exclaimed Harriet, 'what am I to do?'

Nay, but she was his, he said, and she must go with him. Then he attempted to carry her off, but she cried

so loudly, and fought so strongly in her blind strength, that he had to desist. And then he fled to North Bayton, and paced his room restlessly, thinking that at last the day had come to pack up.

That evening, as it was growing dusk, Harriet stole out of Twilight Cottage, and went over the downs by the telegraph-posts towards the cliffs. She knew that the cliffs were terrible, and that they raised their heads seven hundred feet above the sea. And she felt, too, that the sea must be terrible, deep and cold.

The sun had set behind the downs, and the sea was being covered by vast velvet bands of blue mist, and the downs were covered with mystery and infinite twilight. But Harriet could see nothing. Without and within her all was darkness and strong mystery. She knew that she now stood on the last rim of turf which clothed these chalk walls. As she crawled towards their tops, and felt the sheer edge with her hand, a shudder went through her. Death lay at the foot for her, and that meant the end of her blind agony and shame. She had come to leap over, and the sea's raucous whisper seemed to call her and tempt her downwards. But she stood trembling on the blind vertiginous brink, and hesitating, and lifting her hands to the blind sky, and calling herself a coward. Suddenly she heard a voice shrieking : ' Harriet ! Harriet !'

It was Rewbell, who had gone down to Twilight Cottage once more to urge her to flee with him, but had not found her. He had guessed her dreadful purpose, however, and came running in terror through the mist to the cliff-heads.

' Dare come near me !' exclaimed Harriet. ' I shall leap !'

‘Oh, God, Harriet! where are you? where are you?’ shrieked Rewbell, unable to see through the haze, for it was dense at the edge. ‘Ah, my God! take care.’

‘I tell you I shall leap,’ said Harriet, while he strained his eyes to see her, in order that he might come stealthily up, and catch her in time.

Then she was silent, while he called, ‘Oh, Harriet!’ but heard nothing in reply except the steady beat of the waves at the base. He crouched down and took off his shoes, and came nearer, when at last he saw a dim figure on the sheer edge, outlined in the mist.

Suddenly he caught her, and tried to drag her back, and there they struggled between life and death for a few moments where the edge crumbles. Rewbell felt the thin, dry turf and the soft chalk giving way beneath them, as if in another instant they were both to go rolling below; but with a supreme effort he threw himself on his back, and she fell with him on the landward side. While she remained speechless, as if in a swoon, he dragged her up, and over the long downs, and arrived at Twilight Cottage with his feet bleeding. Then with a shriek of mania and triumph he pushed her inside, and went in too, and locked the door.

## CHAPTER IX

MORTE, CHE SEI TU MAI ?

LADY MOMPESSEN, as soon as she arrived at Sidley Square, lost no time in acquainting her brother, Lord Mowhurst, with the real meaning of her visit to town. She had wished, indeed, to avoid town that season, not merely because her husband was too recently dead, but because his memory was too recently smirched. She decided, however, to brave a few of the parties and some of the gossip of her own set because there might thus be a chance that Harold would be delivered from his infatuation for the blind girl. He had mixed too long with a few clowns in the country, such as the ill-bred monster Horneck, and she felt that, if he were restored among his own sort, his pride and his sense of his position would reassert themselves. Someone might be found to take the place of Harriet. Adelaide Bevering had got engaged, but there was Edith Mockler ; there was Beatrice Evergreen ; there were, in short, numerous girls of his own rank, any one of whom would accept eagerly the hand of the Earl of Mompesson.

As for Lady Mompesson herself, she had certainly never been very popular, even among her own set. They endured her because she bore a considerable

name. But she was too stiff and religious, too ostentatiously proper, and it was felt that in her presence anything piquant required generally to be left unsaid. She was only in a very limited sense a woman of the world. She had views, and talked about duties; she kept her back stiff. Some said she should have been a schoolmistress. But, then, it was Mrs. Juxon's opinion—an opinion shared by Princess Brovich, Lady Mockler, Lady Evergreen, Mrs. Hicksey, Lord Fordyce, Sir Albert Montalbert, and so on—that, estimable as Lady Mompesson doubtless was, she would succeed in producing only a sop of a son.

'C'est une vraie "petite vieille,"' said Princess Brovich, 'comme le bon Baudelaire aurait dit. Mariage? Enfants? Hein! Que diable fait elle dans cette galère?'

There was considerable curiosity, therefore, to see Harold, for he had not been in town for at least two years before his coming of age. Gossip, which is like quicksilver, as rapid and as slippery, had preceded him, however, and Lord Mowhurst was able to tell his sister that he knew all the extraordinary follies of which North Bayton had been the scene.

'I shall never cease to thank Providence,' he said, 'that because of a quinsy I was unable to attend the unveiling of that statue.'

Lady Mompesson shuddered, but her brother told her to remain calm. It was her duty to forget the late and terrific Earl in order to look after his idiot of a son.

'But I am perfectly certain that Harold's mind is made up,' said Lady Mompesson. 'Nothing will cure him.'

'Nonsense! nonsense!' said Lord Mowhurst. 'He's

only to see Edith Mockler. I'll speak to her mother. Or Beatrice Evergreen. Heaps of fine girls! Harold's a tomfool!

When, however, Lord Mowhurst spoke to Harold, as if he were still a schoolboy in fear of a flogging, he found that he had mistaken his man.

'Women? What do *you* know about them?' he asked. 'Are you mad? Who's this blind jade I hear about?'

'I would be obliged,' said Harold, 'if you would talk of my Harriet with respect—that's all. I have no need of your advice, nor of other people's.'

'Whew!' exclaimed Lord Mowhurst, with a red face. 'You'll come to a dummy end, that's all.'

Lord Mowhurst then told his sister that Harold might go to the devil! It mattered little to *him* now. And, indeed, it became evident that the boy's separation from Harriet only intensified his love for her. The London season had no interest for him, and he spent most of his time with Leaf and Merridge, looking into the affairs of the estate. He went to few parties, and absolutely refused to dance. Among the matters he was arranging was the purchase of an electric launch, which he would anchor in the little haven at the creek. He had already fixed on one, and had called it *Harriet*, and had sent it down. He and she, he thought, would cruise about in it along the Sussex coast. Moreover, he was buying gifts and jewels for her she would never see. When his mother mentioned Edith Mockler and Beatrice Evergreen, he only shrugged his shoulders.

Lady Mockler was giving parties, and he attended one or two of them. But his thoughts were elsewhere. These gay women wearied him, and, to be sure, they

found him dull. Princess Brovich whispered to him, and asked him if it were actually true that he was going to marry a blind girl; and when he smiled, and said yes, she exclaimed, ‘Quel goût original !’ And then she told him that there were numerous demoiselles, with eyes quite fiercely and imploringly fixed upon him—like Edith Mockler, for instance, or Beatrice Evergreen.

‘Mais peut-être tu as raison, mon garçon. Ce sont les yeux qui sont les miroirs de notre malheur. Mais quel étrange goût ! Ta petite est belle ?’

‘Oui, Princesse,’ said Harold in the worst possible accent, but with a smile which made her forget the accent.

‘Est ce que tu es très naïf ou plutôt très rusé, mon petit malin ? Une femme aveugle ! Mon Dieu ! quelle chance pour le mari ! Tu as trouvé un nouveau frisson, peut-être ?’

Harold shook his head and said he didn’t quite understand everything. But it was at least clear to Princess Brovich, and to others, that he had little interest either in Edith Mockler or Beatrice Evergreen. He talked the necessary twaddle, and was then done with them. They made no impression. And when they asked him if he was going into the army, or if it was to be politics or diplomacy, he said he really hadn’t thought about it. His mother was distracted, and looked furtively at him now and again. He spent most of his day at his club, or looking up some of his old friends.

They had now been about ten days in town, and Harold had written his letter to Harriet to say that he would soon be with her again. It was a Friday, and Lady Mompesson was giving a reception. Lady Mockler and the Evergreens, Lord Rollick, Lord Fordyce, and

Princess Brovich came, and a few others curious to see Harold.

Lady Evergreen said that Lady Mockler had been dragging Edith vainly from one party to the other all through the season. And Lady Mockler said precisely the same about Lady Evergreen and Beatrice. Lady Mockler, who was at least fifty, treated her accumulated years with good-humour.

'Lord Mompesson,' she said, 'I congratulate you and Edith. You *are*. We *were*. The present and future tenses are all yours. Ours are the imperfects! Ah, I see your mother thinks I am flippant. Well, then, Lord Fordyce, wouldn't the Earl do splendidly in politics? Wouldn't he make a good political secretary?'

'Are you going into politics?' asked Lord Fordyce wearily.

'Are politics amusing?' asked Harold.

'Now and again. I remember when I left the Tories to join the Radicals it was described as a bolt from the blue!'

'A man going into Parliament always requires a woman behind him,' said Lady Mockler.

'Two or three,' observed Lord Rollick.

'Whom have you got, then?' asked Lord Fordyce, while Harold only smiled in reply.

'Dear Beatrice,' whispered Lady Mockler to Beatrice Evergreen, 'I never saw you look prettier. Don't lose your blushes, although, indeed, the way not to lose them is to get married.'

'Yes,' said Lady Montalbert, who had overheard, 'and these burn reddest.' Sri Basanti Ballav S<sup>cited by</sup>

I always think,' said Lady Mompesson, 'that women turn witty after they have been unfortunate.' — 7000-6

'Some become unfortunate, and yet never grow witty,' replied Lady Mockler.

'We good ones are dull,' observed Lady Evergreen.  
'I wish I could be witty. What ought I to say now?'

'That it's a good thing,' said Lady Mockler, 'that a schoolmistress is generally an old maid, else what would become of our girls?'

'You mean,' asked Lady Evergreen, 'that true knowledge of life is possible only after the irrevocable step?'

'Yes; and if a woman is a dullard after marriage, she's hopeless,' replied Lady Mockler.

'You say strange things in the ears of young people,' said Lady Mompesson. 'I am sure neither Edith nor Harold has ever had a disillusion. It's a word in the mouths of you modern women. Let the young marry the young, I say, and all the illusions will drop out of their own accord.'

'The only difference between a young man and an old one,' said Princess Brovich, 'is that the young man *has* all the passions, and the old one has had them. But I agree with you. For a young bride love must be a set of idolatries, and for an old one a set of paradoxes. In the case of an old bridegroom, it is love at second sight, I suppose?'

'The most important people in a room,' said Lady Mockler, 'are always the youngest. Ah, you all call me a gossip. But gossip is a great power. It's as good as the pulpit. It is Society's rat's-bane, and kills off hundreds of little vermin sins, and big ones too!'

The door opened, and Horneck was announced. At the apparition of the huge doctor a dead silence fell on the room.

'Mon Dieu!' said Princess Brovich, almost audibly; 'cet homme vient de l'enfer.'

And, indeed, the expression on the doctor's face was so unearthly that the surprise of the Princess was shared by almost everyone in the room.

Harold rose and went forward to receive him, but was shocked by his look. He asked what was wrong, if there was anything wrong with Harriet. Everyone heard him. Horneck, seeing that the room was full of guests, wished to turn back, and muttered :

'Ah, I did not know. I thought you might be alone.'

Harold brought him forward to Lady Mompesson, who shook hands with him very stiffly and yet in great agitation.

In a short time most people in the room knew that this was the evil genius of the young lord. Princess Brovich, however, drew Harold aside, and asked him to introduce her at once. But when Horneck shook hands with her and turned his eyes on hers with a kind of weary glare, Harold saw that there was something wrong, and wished to speak with him alone. All eyes were fixed on the massive figure surmounted by the dark, shaggy, massive head.

'Monstrous head,' whispered Princess Brovich to Harold, as Horneck stood lonely and isolated in their midst.

Lady Mompesson endeavoured to keep up a conversation with Lady Evergreen, who asked if this was the uncle.

'An extraordinary man,' whispered Princess Brovich, 'a sort of gorgeous Lucifer turning old!'

Horneck, indeed, seemed to have grown old since

Harold last saw him. Presently he whispered that he would like to leave, and, after having bowed to Lady Mompesson and Princess Brovich, went out of the room with Harold, who took him to the library, while the astonished guests were left to speculate on the meaning of his apparition. As soon as the library door was shut, Harold said excitedly :

'Doctor, is there anything wrong with Harriet? You are looking dreadful, doctor!'

'No, no! there is nothing wrong with Harriet, so far as I know,' said Horneck. 'I left her well. It is . . . O God!'

'What is it, doctor?'

'They tell me there . . . there is no hope of ever finding Elsie. Oh, Harold! . . . Oh, where is Elsie!' shrieked Horneck as he seized the boy's hands. 'Harold, I feel . . . I feel that my brain is going . . . My Elsie, my daughter, my dear . . .'

'Doctor, where are you living? Why did you not let me know sooner? And does . . . does Harriet know?'

'Oh . . . oh . . . my love for Elsie is making a coward of me. . . . If I could get my Elsie back, I would believe in God again . . . Yes, yes! Under the shadow of His wings! But now—oh, this is bottomless misery, Harold! This is indescribable deep misery.'

'Doctor, I shall be a son to you—I. You shall stay here till I go back to Harriet.'

'Oh no! take me . . . take me now to the sweet downs! D'ye hear the sea?' said Horneck vaguely, casting strange eyes on Harold.

'Yes, yes. We shall start to-morrow,' said Harold. 'I am sick of it all here. London means nothing to me just now.'

It was a Friday. Harold had written to Harriet, as we know, saying that he would be back on Tuesday of the next week. But he decided to take the doctor away at once, and start next day. When his mother heard it, she was appalled.

'Appalled?' he asked. 'Are you indeed?'

'Harold, do you mean to say you are going to marry that blind child? Oh gracious! are you mad? I thought you were changing for the better, too.'

'Yes, I am going to marry the "blind child,"' said Harold calmly, 'but meantime Dr. Horneck is ill, and I must attend to him.'

'Harold,' she said, unable to tear herself away from him, 'I am going to come with you. You will allow your mother to come with you?'

'Yes,' he said, 'come. Why not?'

He kept the doctor with him all night, and they started next day. Lady Mompesson had, indeed, little to fear from Horneck, who was really a shattered man. And as he sat opposite her in the railway-carriage, muttering Eisie's name, she, too, pitied him.

The journey seemed long, long to Harold, and it was only as they were nearing Eight Bells that it occurred to him that he had forgotten to telegraph to Rewbell. Still, they would get carriages at the station, and it would be all the more delightful, he thought, to give Harriet a surprise. His mother, beside him, was attempting to resign herself to the inevitable.

The train was running through the yellow fields of Sussex. It was a sultry mid-July day of heavy air, and the rich land looked sumptuous but glowing under the sky packed with motionless thunder-clouds.

'Ah, it's going to rain,' said Harold, as he saw some sputterings and drops on the window.

Dr. Horneck was smiling at the yellow fields as if he were very pleased to see them again.

'Poor man!' exclaimed Lady Mompesson; 'he evidently loved his daughter.'

Soon they came in sight of the sea, which was lying immobile and dark. And then the train pulled up at Eight Bells, and Harold alighted. He ordered two carriages—one for his disillusioned mother, who now seemed to obey him mechanically, and the other for the doctor and himself.

Now, if Rewbell had known of their coming he might have escaped. Harold's letter, however, had said Tuesday, and Rewbell was still urging Harriet to flee with him. At any rate, he little expected that the Earl and his mother and Dr. Horneck would thus suddenly arrive. In fact, at the very moment they were driving to North Bayton, Rewbell, who had taken Harriet thither again against her will, was still protesting that she was now irrevocably his.

It was about six o'clock, and it was unusually dark, owing to the clouds of the approaching storm. The sea-gulls were flying over the downs landward, and there was already a wind on the sea.

Lady Mompesson had driven to North Bayton hardly yet able to realize that Harold's intentions were real; and as she passed Twilight Cottage and the two cottages beside it she thought that the last six months had been the strangest of all her life. Following her were Harold and the doctor, and they alighted at Twilight Cottage. Harold was eager to run to the door, but could not leave the doctor, and so led him slowly up the little gravel

walk. Horneck stopped in the middle, and, pointing to Elsie Cottage, which he suddenly recognised, asked with a shriek : ' Is *he* there ? '

Harold quietened him, however, and led him up.

' Is *Marriet* in ? ' he asked as soon as the door was opened.

' Oh, please no, your lordship ! ' said the servant, astonished at seeing Horneck and Harold ; ' she . . . she's at the castle.'

The catastrophe was complete by nine o'clock of the darkest summer night that had ever fallen over Eight Bells and the downs. For the clouds were so thick that even as Harold ran up his avenue he could not see where the footpath ended and the lawn began. When he arrived at North Bayton he found a strange scene. His mother was bending over Harriet, who appeared to be sobbing, and was crying :

' Where is Harold ? '

' Here, here ! • What is it ? ' he exclaimed, as he pushed them aside. ' Harriet ! '

' Harold, I am yours no longer. He has . . . oh, Harold ! '

' Gracious God, Harriet ! what is it ? ' he cried, as he sent his mother and the servants out of the room and locked the door.

' Harold, are you there ? ' she asked, lifting her head.

' Yes, yes ! For God's sake speak ! '

' Harold, I am glad I have no eyes to see your face. Don't come near me ! I am not fit to touch your feet ! Harold—oh, will you forgive blind sin ? ' she asked, as she sat quivering before him.

For the moment his mind became a blur, until the

truth suddenly seemed to light it hideously and ruthlessly up.

'Harriet! gracious God! . . . Can it . . . was it . . . O Heaven! . . . Rewbell!'

'I was blind—oh, I was blind!' she cried. 'Harold, I wish to die now!'

He fled out, and his mother saw him rush to the gunnery, as the room was called in which the sporting guns and pistols and shot were kept. She tried to stop him as he went running past, shrieking, 'Where is he?' while one of the servants answered, 'He's gone into the cypresses, your lordship.'

Rewbell, in fact, as soon as he knew of their approach, had fled to the upper garden, hoping to make his escape good when darker night would come on. There was a small cluster of cypress-trees in the upper garden, and here he was hiding when Harold rushed up into them crying: 'Rewbell! Rewbell!'

He saw a figure darting away in the dusk, but he made good his aim, and Rewbell fell, with a thud and a cry, shot dead. Lady Mompesson heard the shot, and knew what it meant; but before Harold came back, with his face so full of the terrible madness of his vengeance, she had fainted. And Harriet heard it, too, and asked who was dead, but no one answered her in the midst of the confusion which filled North Bayton for the next two hours. Some of the servants ran down to Twilight Cottage for Horneck, but when he came up, dazed and hardly able to grasp the situation, he could do nothing for Rewbell, whom they had brought in dead on a plank.

Meanwhile, Harold became fully conscious of his deed.

In a short time Eight Bells and Eastdown and Seadown would know that a terrible thing had happened at North Bayton. As yet none of the servants had stirred from the grounds, but were running hither and thither discussing the fact. A stable-boy, however, unable to contain the news, had gone down to the highroad, and there met the Eastdown carrier, and told him excitedly that the Earl had murdered Rewbell. So that the carrier was now speeding with it to Eight Bells, and soon all the village would be in consternation.

Luckily, that was the day of the great annual fair at Eastdown, and the police-sergeant of Eight Bells had been called thither. Thus, if Harold wished to escape there might still be time. But already Porlock had heard the news, and had started terrified for North Bayton, and, in spite of the threatening storm, one or two of the eager villagers who had not gone to Eastdown were likewise on their way to the castle to hear the news.

Suddenly Harold began to feel anxious. He was unable to collect his thoughts. He had killed a man, and he knew his arrest would be the result. In a few minutes he might be compelled to surrender his liberty. His wild thoughts about Harriet and the dead man were filling his brain. But his own conviction of the wild and primitive justice of his act was not sufficient to suppress or override his sense of the peril he was in. A desire to get away seized him—a desire to keep his freedom. But those minutes of his freedom were passing. He was in his own bedroom, pacing wildly to and fro, and he heard the confusion of the house. He heard Harriet crying, ‘Who is dead? . . . Who is it that’s dead, d’ye

hear?' and the running hither and thither of the servants, and his mother calling, 'Where is he? Tell him to flee!'

He came out of his own room into the long upper corridor, and met Horneck fumbling for the handle of his door.

'They tell me . . . oh, they tell me that this is a fiendish night, and that some murderer is walking in it! I have seen a murdered man!' said Horneck. But when he saw Harold he started back, and exclaimed: 'Your eyes—oh God, your eyes! I used to have eyes like that. What is wrong?'

Harold said: 'Go, doctor, go!'

Presently he was heard calling for Wharton, who came running up.

'Saddle the roan!' he said.

'Yes, your lordship. Shall I come with you? I will go with you anywhere,' said Wharton.

'All right, Teddy,' said Harold, trembling slightly and aghast. 'We will get aboard the launch. Quick! The storm is getting worse.'

Wharton brought round the horses, and they mounted them, and Harriet heard the jingling of the bridles on the avenue, and the hoofs of the horses galloping away. And she sped after, for the darkness came easy to her, down the avenue and across the road and over the downs, where she heard nothing but the mutterings and the descent of the storm.

Wharton and Harold were making for the creek. The downs were not yet wholly dark, but it would be easy to lose the road, and so Harold followed the telegraph-posts which he detected dimly along the cliffs.

More than twenty minutes must have passed, and meantime Harriet, seeking her fate once more, had arrived at the cliff-tops, frowning darkly over the sea. Suddenly she heard the galloping of the hoofs again, sounding with loud thuds on the turf. It was Harold and Wharton on their way back, for they had forgotten money and provisions in their wild haste, and thought there might still be time.

'Harold, is it you?' shrieked Harriet.

He heard her voice, and the first lightning flash revealed her figure on the cliffs. He dismounted with a cry, and momentarily let go his rein. And the roan went plunging landward, glad to be free, while Wharton galloped in pursuit.

'Harriet! Harriet!' cried Harold. 'What are you doing here? Come back! You're on the edge. I can't leave you in danger. Let me take you home first, and then I shall leave you for ever!'

'Oh, Harold, is it *you*?' cried Harriet as she fell about his feet.

'Rise, Harriet, rise! I have no time. I must escape.'

'Harold! Harold!' she said, clinging to him. 'Oh, it was my blindness! Harold, let me die with you! I knew nothing. . . . If I had had eyes . . .'

'Oh, God!' cried Harold. 'Rise, rise, I say! We shall never get aboard. They are in chase of me. I shall take you back out of danger. I must away. I have murdered a man, all for you! Dr. Horneck must care for you now if he can.'

But she clung about his knees, and if he struggled with her too much he might hurl her over the cliffs.

The storm was now beating on the downs, and the lightning was painting the seas, and his pursuers were on his track. The sky had already become a wind-pit, and the sea was raging stretched on the rack of the winds.

'Rise, Harriet, rise!' he called, while the lightnings were casting on them their terrible smile on the sheer edge, where the cliff-tops nod over the waves.

And the subtle, frightful edge was the only white line between the two darknesses of the downs and the sea. For night, deep night, was all round them, pouring its phials of darkness and strong mystery. But the lightning, like a glittering poison, was shaking itself through the sky. And the storm, a great rootless thing, was hastening across the earth and the splitting sea.

'Harriet, let me go! I have no time!' he cried, making one supreme effort to extricate himself without hurling her over. 'Harriet, we are on the very edge. Gracious God! it is crumbling! The sea and the rocks are beneath . . . Harriet!'

Their feet were on the last brittle rim and blind brink. Infinite darkness was behind them and before them, and beneath them the terror of the sea waiting for them. In a moment they went falling sheer down together as into some frightful cold hell, through gates of infamous sea-scoured rock. And they were searched for in vain all that wild night, and seemed to be mingled with its perishing and stormy phantasmagoria. For although rumour went that Harold had escaped, and men came running from Eight Bells to seize him, they found only the roan plunging and whinnying on the dark downs.

But in the morning, when the dawn rose like still

'lightning, marigold, placid and like a benediction—  
eternal *riso del sole*—Horneck came to the place beneath  
which they were lying sea-washed, broken together, and  
muttered three names, stretching out his hands :

'Elsie . . . Harold . . . Harriet . . . my children  
. . . ah, my poor children !'

THE END